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General Assembly

Twenty-third special session

Official Records

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New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda items 8 and 9 *(continued)*

Review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the twelve critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action

Further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

The President: This morning, I should like once again, and very seriously, to appeal to all speakers scrupulously to adhere to the seven-minute limit that we have set for ourselves.

The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Mrs. Gladys Caballero de Arévalo, Vice-President of the Republic of Honduras.

Mrs. Caballero de Arévalo (Honduras) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Honduras, headed by His Excellency Mr. Carlos Roberto Flores Facussé, it is an honour for me to take part, along with so many other delegations, in this important special session to evaluate the implementation of the global Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women.

The holding of this special session coincides with the year 2000, a time when human beings are instinctively pausing to reflect on the future of humankind. At the start of a new millennium, I am pleased to say that human beings are aware of women's pivotal role in development, and therefore in international peace. Aware of the importance of women, the Government of Honduras has achieved significant progress during the last five years in establishing a new legal framework beneficial to women's rights.

That progress is reflected in the country's Constitution, which establishes the right to freedom, health and equality without regard to sex, race, religion or social status. It can also be seen in the law against domestic violence, the code on childhood and adolescence, the law creating the National Institute for Women, the law on HIV/AIDS, the recently approved equal opportunity law for women and the reforms undertaken in agricultural modernization that establish the obligation to register plots of land in the names of couples and women heads of households.

Other achievements in the field of public policy include the development and implementation of the policy on equality in agriculture, the policy on equality in natural resources and the policy on sexual and reproductive health, by which we have been able to increase the use of contraceptive methods. That increase translates into a slow yet sustained reduction in the birth rate.

Likewise, we have also made progress by establishing the National Institute for Women at the State secretariat level, creating the post of attorney general for women and setting up the Family Council under the health secretariat to offer prevention,

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assistance and protection services to victims of domestic violence.

Since a primary interest of the Government of Honduras is to promote the participation of women in decision-making at all levels, a woman currently serves in the State Cabinet as Vice-President and another as President of the Central Bank. Additionally, women hold the posts of ministers in the security, finance, labour, tourism, and natural resources and environment departments. Women also play a role as State comptrollers and prosecutors.

Despite this progress, Honduras is still a developing country that has suffered from the negative consequences of globalization, which have created obstacles to the consolidation of the achievements attained and to progress towards the objectives established to benefit the more than 2.5 million women and girls in our country.

The majority of the Honduran population lives in poverty due to structural reasons, and according to data from the World Bank that poverty extends to over half of all families. The application of structural adjustment policies has had a negative impact on the most vulnerable social groups, particularly on poor women. There is limited access in Honduras to stable, paid work that provides social security, a fact that is linked to the absence of educational and training opportunities for women.

These challenges to development in Honduras were aggravated by the devastating impact of hurricane Mitch, which affected approximately 2 million people and left over 5,600 dead, 8,000 persons unaccounted for and about 12,000 injured. With regard to material losses, it is estimated that 70 per cent of agricultural production and 80,000 homes were destroyed.

We recognize that it is our responsibility to overcome the obstacles that hinder the achievement of the objectives set out in the global Platform for Action. For instance, we must improve policies aimed at households headed by women, which comprise 30 per cent of the households in Honduras. Similarly, we are deeply concerned by increased maternal mortality rates associated with the rise in immunological diseases, especially HIV/AIDS. We must also put in place policies that effectively address the needs of adolescents and that include sexual education, which ensures responsible sexual conduct. Likewise, we will continue fighting domestic violence against women in its psychological and physical manifestations.

Our Government reiterates the commitment it assumed in Beijing of advancing the implementation of the global Platform for Action while taking into account the consensus reached by Latin America and the Caribbean at the meetings held in Santiago and Lima. We place special emphasis on making progress in the development and implementation of the plan to fight poverty, which places at the centre of its concerns the needs and demands of women as agents of development, and on making sexual and reproductive health a priority for the development of our society through the national policy on sexual and reproductive health, including the application of integrated strategies to accelerate the reduction of maternal mortality, which, despite a decrease, remains unacceptably high. Other areas of interest in this regard are to address the health needs of adolescents from a systematic and integral perspective; to promote through public policies and their mechanisms the prevention and punishment of violence against women in all its manifestations; to make efforts in educational policies to increase the coverage and revision of educational content in order to guarantee non-sexist education; to strengthen the National Institute for Women at the political, institutional and financial level, as well as the other mechanisms established by the State to promote the advancement of women; and to energize dialogue and consultation with civil society, and with women's groups in particular, to unify efforts to implement the global Platform for Action.

In the globalized world in which we currently live, it is impossible to isolate one topic from another. Undoubtedly, the three topics of development, gender equality and peace are intimately interrelated — none of these important objectives can be obtained without the others. Conscious of this reality, and firmly attached to the objective of making the twenty-first century one in which globalization will be a positive force for the development of all human beings, especially women, I am honoured, on behalf of the people and the Government of Honduras, to reaffirm our commitment to take the necessary measures to ensure that women have available to them the requisite means to fulfil their indispensable role in world development.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Saidie Tohma Abbas, Minister for Labour and Social Affairs of Iraq.

Mr. Abbas (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to take this opportunity to thank you, Mr. President, the Commission on the Status of Women and the Division for the Advancement of Women for all the work done to prepare for this special session of the General Assembly.

There is no doubt that the implementation of women's rights and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women are among the priority objectives of the international community, and that they constitute an integral part of its activities. Those activities, in turn, have helped give shape to the norms that ensure the protection of women and promote their full participation in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life, both at the national and international levels. Accordingly, the condition of women and the improvement of their status can be dealt with only within the framework of an all-encompassing view of human rights in general and to the extent that these rights are affected by economic, social and political conditions and variables.

Throughout the ages, women in Iraq have enjoyed rights and privileges recognized by custom and guaranteed by law. That state of affairs was embodied in the very first legislation known to history, the Code of Hammurabi, which affirmed the legal personhood of women. Within this framework, and in the context of social and economic developments in Iraq and the accompanying ambitious development plans, a number of legislative measures have been enacted whose provisions were inspired by the tolerant nature of Islamic law and Iraq's cultural and humanitarian heritage. These measures have ensured women's rights to health care, education and political participation, as well as to everything relating to the advancement of women, the amelioration of their economic and social conditions, the eradication of poverty and unemployment, and the improvement of professional training and rehabilitation.

Those measures have also provided greater participation and protection for women and have thus led to the removal of all traditional barriers and restrictions obstructing the progress of women, and have created equality between men and women in various sectors.

In support of the legislative and executive steps it has taken to improve the status of women, the Republic of Iraq has acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which has now been incorporated into our national legislation. The Government has also adopted a national strategy for the advancement of Iraqi women in the light of elements of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Despite the abnormal circumstances in which Iraq lives owing to the continuation of the unjust embargo that has been imposed on it for the past 10 years, and to the continuous military aggression waged by the United States and the United Kingdom, the Iraqi Government has formed a high-level national committee for the advancement of Iraqi women, which has the task of formulating policies and establishing mechanisms that will ensure the implementation of those policies both at the official and the grass-roots levels, as well as creating specialized committees for the advancement of women in official institutions, professional organizations and associations. In addition, it has reactivated the role of non-governmental organizations concerned with women, in particular the General Federation of Iraqi Women.

In any country, the implementation of human rights, including the right to development — and especially women's rights — depends on three elements: the political will of the State, the resources available, and international cooperation. There is no doubt that the continued imposition of comprehensive sanctions on Iraq has neutralized two of these elements — available resources and international cooperation — thus isolating the first, political will, from the other two and rendering it effectively unrealizable. The implementation of human rights has thus proved to be unfeasible, and the only fair solution to this problem lies in removing all the restrictions and lifting the embargo in order to facilitate the flow of resources needed for Iraq to carry out all national programmes and international obligations.

In this connection, we should like to point out that article 145 (i) of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action urged Governments and international and regional organizations to take action in accordance with international law with a view to alleviating the adverse effects of economic sanctions on women and children. But it made no provision for a mechanism for

implementation by the United Nations organs and agencies concerned with following up the Beijing Platform for Action, and it has thus remained only ink on paper. Moreover, paragraph 746 of the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit on Social Development (A/AC.253/13) points out that the severe crisis in Iraq caused by sanctions has reduced standards of living generally and increased poverty.

It is worth mentioning that, as noted in reports of international humanitarian organizations, of which the latest is the 1999 report of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the oil for food programme signed by the Republic of Iraq and the United Nations in order to meet some of the basic needs of the Iraqi people has not halted the deterioration of the humanitarian situation of women and children. Furthermore, in its decision 1999/110 of 26 August 1999, on the humanitarian situation in Iraq, the Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights appealed to the international community and to the Security Council to lift the embargo because it constitutes a violation of the rights of the civilian population.

The progress achieved by Iraqi women in the cultural, social and economic spheres has been undermined by the imposition and continuation of the embargo and by the accompanying collapse of the country's infrastructure. The embargo has wrought destruction in all sectors and amenities of life and has inflicted incalculable damage on all sectors of Iraqi society, in particular women and children, the two groups most likely to be affected by environmental and economic conditions.

The acute shortages of food, medicines and other basic necessities of life have deprived the Iraqi people, and above all women and children, of their livelihood. This is clearly and alarmingly reflected in the state of health of women, particularly mothers and women of child-bearing age. The latest survey conducted by UNICEF indicates that the present rate of maternal mortality is 294 per 10,000 live births, and that the incidence of anaemia among pregnant women has risen to 60 per cent, leading to an increase in the percentage of newborn babies weighing less than 2.5 kilogrammes. In addition, there has been a proliferation of diseases of the thyroid gland and of premature births, as well as an eight-fold increase in the incidence of viral hepatitis and infections of the respiratory system among mothers and children as compared with their incidence before the embargo.

The environmental pollution caused by the use by United States and United Kingdom forces of depleted uranium bombs, which are a new generation of radioactive weapons, has led to the emergence of incurable diseases among women, including miscarriages, sterility, congenital embryonic deformities, cancerous diseases such as leukaemia, breast cancer and cancer of the ovaries, and neurological and muscular disorders. There were 3,894 recorded cases of cancer among Iraqi women in 1999, and the total number of deaths among women due to causes specifically related to the embargo is 261,563, in addition to the death of some 8,000 children under the age of five every month.

Women have been affected not only physically, but also psychologically and socially, by the embargo and the United States-British military aggression. They have suffered social and psychological disorders, including anxiety, depression, tension and lack of concentration. Numerous studies have indicated that 57 per cent of women suffer from such conditions and have pointed to a rise in the incidence of divorce because of worsening conditions and economic pressures. Women have been forced to abandon their careers, because the ever-higher cost of living and inflation have led them to turn full time to domestic responsibilities in order to cope with the burdens of life, which keep growing heavier day by day — to say nothing of the great number of women and girls dropping out of educational institutions at every level because of a lack of financial resources.

Thus, the abnormal conditions brought about by the embargo since its imposition in 1990, and the accompanying daily acts of military aggression committed within the illegal no-fly zones by United States and United Kingdom aircraft, whose bombs make no distinction between civilian and military targets or between an infant and an old woman, have inflicted very grave material and moral damage on the civilian population.

In the light of these tragic facts, which have attained dimensions that cannot be ignored, the international community is now duty-bound to examine most scrupulously the grave consequences of the imposition of such sanctions on States and to demand an end to such sanctions, because they constitute a

crime against humanity. On behalf of the women and the children of Iraq, we appeal to members to shoulder their legal and humanitarian responsibilities and do their utmost to put an end to this suffering by lifting the sanctions, which have proved to be contrary to all values and laws that have been generally accepted by human societies past and present. In that way, the women of Iraq will be able to resume their true role in building the family and civilized society. We are confident that our appeal will meet with a positive response from the Assembly.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Judit Szemkeő Szilágy, State Secretary, Ministry of Social and Family Affairs of Hungary.

Ms. Szilágy (Hungary): In accordance with its traditions, Hungary is firmly committed to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. We welcome the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention. At the same time, we regret that universal ratification of the Convention could not be achieved by the year 2000. The fact that the Convention has been ratified by 165 States is, however, a positive sign; the number of signatories of the Optional Protocol is also growing. The Government of Hungary has submitted the Protocol to parliament so that our country can accede to it.

Let me refer to some important facts from Hungarian history with respect to the issue of equal opportunities for women. The opportunity for girls to attend school was proclaimed in Hungary as early as the eighteenth century. Schooling for girls and boys between the ages of 6 and 12 became compulsory as early as 1868. The first kindergarten was founded in the first half of the nineteenth century — by a woman, incidentally. In the second half of the nineteenth century, more than 5 per cent of the teachers were women. As early as the end of the nineteenth century, there were female students in the universities of Hungary. The first woman member of the Hungarian parliament was elected in 1920.

Providing full-time work for every woman was declared a goal in Hungary in the 1950s. This policy was double-faceted. On the one hand, there were disadvantages. As the model of the family had changed from reliance on one person's income to reliance on two persons' income, women had no choice but to seek work. They became overburdened by having to undertake both employment in the workplace and traditional house chores. At the same time, there was no institutional protection of women. On the other hand, there were also advantages to this system. Institutions needed for full-time child care — nurseries, kindergartens and schools — were established all over the country. More and more girls began to study in higher education. Today, about 50 per cent of 18-year-old girls are enrolled as university students. All the professions became wide open for women — even politics.

With the democratic changes, several problems came to the surface in the country. About 5.8 per cent of women are unemployed, but the rate of unemployment is much higher for women over the age of 40. Women's participation in politics and public life has remained regrettably low, because the earlier policy was merely declaratory, there was a lack of genuine motivation and women did not really possess the means to pursue their interests. In order to ensure equal opportunity in practice, Hungary has put special emphasis on efforts to give women real possibilities for choice.

The country is seeking to promote the employment of women and to plan the wider availability of part-time job opportunities; to help women and men reconcile work and family duties; to increase childcare subsidies, subject to improving economic conditions, and to make them available to both parents as a basic citizen's right; to set up institutions for the protection of victims of family abuse; to enhance the role of education and training for careers, professional orientation and employment, as well as in relation to family planning and the prevention of violence in the family; and to improve institutional recourse to legal remedies.

The development of civil society and cooperation with it are among the cornerstones of democracy and gender equality in our country. The Council of Women's Representation, established in 1999, has among its members representatives of civil organizations as well as of various Government ministries and academic life. Cooperation between civil society and the scientific community in initiating laws and programmes for the promotion of gender equality has been promising.

Hungary continues to be committed to eliminating all forms of discrimination against women.

In this context, we attach particular importance to the full implementation of the principles formulated in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. We share the opinion that Governments have the primary responsibility for making progress in the 12 areas of special concern.

I wish to take this opportunity to reiterate that my country supports all international efforts leading to the classification of all gender-based crimes, including sexual slavery and enforced prostitution, as crimes against humanity or war crimes, as defined in the Statute of the International Criminal Court. We share in particular the objective of improving the legal literacy and awareness of women, in conformity with the principle that women's rights are human rights.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Aitkul Samakova, Minister, Chairperson of the National Commission on Family and Women's Affairs of Kazakhstan.

Ms. Samakova (Kazakhstan) (*spoke in Russian*): The World Conference on the status of women in Beijing played an outstanding role in the development of the women's movement throughout the entire world. The Platform for Action, adopted at the Conference, in many ways defined the direction of the development of the women's movement at the end of the second and the beginning of the third millennium.

We welcome the establishment, following the Beijing Conference, of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, which is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and, if necessary, undertaking additional measures to ensure its implementation. Following a government initiative, Kazakhstan's Gender in Development Bureau has been transformed into a United Nations gender bureau, responsible for coordinating all United Nations agencies in the area of family and women, as well as for rendering assistance in resource mobilization for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

We greatly value the activities of the United Nations in preparing for this session of the General Assembly. We have had the opportunity to participate in a number of preparatory conferences. One such conference for the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Mongolia and Turkey, entitled "Beijing + 5: conclusions and perspectives", was held in Kazakhstan.

During that conference, it was noted that countries in economic transition have many problems in common and that we should address them collectively. That is why the participants in that conference suggested forming a regional intergovernmental group. We also considered the possibility of establishing a committee on gender issues within the framework of the Interparliamentary Assembly of Member Nations of the CIS and the Regional Council of Heads of National Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women. Currently, all of these issues are being discussed with the Governments of the countries that participated in the conference.

In order to support the women's movement in Kazakhstan, the post of Chairperson of the National Commission on Family and Women's Affairs — a ministerial position in the Republic, directly under the head of State — was introduced for the first time, a position that I assumed.

The main goal of the National Commission is to act as an institutional catalyst for addressing women's issues. It has been given wide responsibilities and functions. Its mandate has allowed us to work in close cooperation with all ministries and agencies and to adopt, at the Government level, the National Action Plan for Improving the Status of Women in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

A significant amount of work is being carried out in Kazakhstan for the political advancement of women. In accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, women and men in our country are given equal rights in all spheres of life and activities. We have joined over 20 international conventions and agreements, including the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. A further five conventions are currently in the process of being prepared for ratification. Among them are the conventions relating to equal pay for women and men for equal work and to minimum working age.

Women's non-governmental organizations, which amount to over 100, are very active in the area of the political advancement of women. Last year, they registered their first political party, the Political Alliance of Women's Organizations. However, declarations of equal rights for men and women are not always supported by real guarantees and equal opportunities.

Women are under-represented at all decision-making levels. For example, out of 116 Members of Parliament, there are only 13 women — a total of 11 per cent. Among the Ministers, I am the only woman. In the executive State bodies, only 7 per cent to 8 per cent of the top decision makers are women. There are few women in decision-making positions even in traditionally female spheres of public life.

In order to achieve gender balance in society, we have started to include gender expertise in the entire national legislation, as well as to develop the draft law on equal rights and opportunities. Beginning last year, a statistical brochure entitled "Women and men of Kazakhstan" was being published to reflect all aspects of the gender situation in the country.

Gender issues are also regularly covered on the pages of the National Commission's journal entitled *Women: East and West*, as well as in many other publications of the mass media.

We have succeeded in drawing the attention of politicians and society to such important issues as violence against women. With the support of the mass media, we are working to sensitize the population on preventive measures against violence. The first crisis centre shelter for female victims of violence was established with State participation. Currently, a draft law on domestic violence is being developed. We support and are very actively participating in the international zero tolerance for violence against women campaign, which is scheduled to be held in the year 2001.

One of the main priorities of the National Commission on Family and Women's Affairs is the economic advancement of women. In Kazakhstan, before perestroika, light industry was well developed and about 90 per cent of women were employed in that area. But, with the restructuring of the economy, these enterprises to a large degree are today shut down or not fully functioning. In order to revise light industry and provide employment to women, the Government of Kazakhstan is offering a number of significant incentives to enterprises in this industry. There are three-year tax holidays and a zero rate of value added tax. Despite this, many enterprises today are not working at full capacity because they need investments.

We discussed these issues at the Eurasian Economic Summit, which was held in April 2000 in Almaty. We also presented the participants in the summit with business plans of our enterprises. Therefore, I would like to invite the representatives of business and financial circles present here in Kazakhstan to participate in these investment programmes.

Since 1999, a microcredit programme for the most vulnerable citizens has been in implementation. Two thirds of the beneficiaries are women, mainly from rural areas. Experience has shown that even a small microcredit amount plays a significant role in the development of women's entrepreneurship. In our situation, this is primarily an effort to eradicate poverty. Unfortunately, despite outside financing, we are suffering from a lack of credit resources. A special credit line has been established in one of the banks to support women's entrepreneurship in the productive sphere, following the initiative of the National Commission, but that is not enough. This is why we are very glad that in the draft conclusions of our session, a special task has been given to United Nations country offices and international organizations to take measures to render assistance to Governments of the countries in transition in their elaboration and implementation of plans and programmes aimed at the expansion of economic opportunities for women. We hope that the United Nations can draw the attention of the world financial institutions to this extremely important problem.

Another problematic area of activity is women's health. In Kazakhstan, the health index for women is only 30 per cent; in some areas, it is only 20 per cent or less. Two thirds of our women are suffering from anaemia. There has been an increase in breast cancer and a consequent significant increase in women's mortality. Overall, this is to a great degree attributed to the many years of nuclear tests at the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site and the Aral ecological catastrophe.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank, the United Nations United Nations Fund for Population Activities, the United Nations Children's Fund and other international organizations for the assistance they have been providing. We greatly appreciate the United Nations recommendations to international organizations to provide resources to national

programmes on the implementation of the Platform for Action in all 12 critical areas. For us, women's health is one such critical area.

This special session of the General Assembly will define new tasks and directions for activities leading towards the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and further measures and initiatives to ensure equality between men and women, development and peace in the twenty-first century. For our part, we will do everything possible for the attainment of these noble goals. I propose that we adopt the text of the Political Declaration and the draft conclusions of our session, taking into consideration the aforementioned comments and suggestions of our delegation.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Osmo Soininvaara, Minister for Health and Social Welfare of Finland.

Mr. Soininvaara (Finland): Finland aligns itself with the statement made by the Portuguese Minister for Equality on behalf of the European Union. I would like to make a few additional remarks on issues that are of particular interest to Finland.

The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing was an important milestone in the advancement of women and gender equality. Now a strong recommitment is needed in order to fully implement the results reached five years ago. After Beijing, the Government of Finland adopted and implemented a Plan of Action. Now the Government will decide how to proceed.

Finland welcomes the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. We support its speedy ratification and entry into force. In Finland, the ratification will be concluded in a few months' time.

Almost 100 years ago, Finland was the first country in the world to give women full political rights. Today, we have a female President and a female Speaker of the Parliament. Women are well represented in political life at all levels. The quota provisions have had a dramatic effect on women's participation, especially at the local level. The quota system requires a minimum of 40 per cent of both men and women in governmental and municipal bodies.

In Finland, women have been active developers of the welfare State. Social security, as well as social and health-care services, especially day care for children and parental leave, make it possible for mothers and fathers to work outside the home and earn their living. Inequality between women and men, however, remains a fact in working life. Women's salaries are, on average, about 82 per cent of men's salaries, for several reasons. Finnish women are highly educated, working outside the home, actively involved in political life and economically independent. However, they face the burden of reconciling the family and the growing demands of working life. In the so-called new economy that is rapidly growing in Finland, individual competition between workers and the strong commitment required to work can result in a situation where parents — both mothers and fathers — do not use their legal parental rights. As a father, I have to say that fathers are also deprived of their children and family because of the growing demands of working life.

Violence against women is a serious human rights violation. The Beijing Conference and the work carried out by the United Nations Development Fund for Women have raised awareness of this problem. In accordance with its Plan of Action, the Government of Finland has taken responsibility to combat violence against women. Sexual offences are extensively defined as offences subject to public prosecution. The legislation on restraining orders effectively protects women against violence. Restraining orders prohibit violent persons from approaching their victims. This legislation has proved to be very effective. More than 1,000 restraining orders were issued in one year. An extensive victimization survey on violence against women was conducted in Finland recently. A study on the cost of violence caused to individuals, employers and society will soon be published.

Girl children require particular attention. The feminization of poverty starts with the treatment of girl children. Poverty and gender-based inequities, together with lack of education and inadequate access to health care, have serious consequences.

Today's new challenge worldwide is how to help women and girls make better use of information and communications technology. The revolution in this field can and should empower women. It offers access to information on health, education, training, financing and so on, and it will also help women's networking all over the world.

HIV/AIDS is one of the biggest health risks and threats to development at the moment. As the new chairperson of the Programme Coordination Board of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, I would like to address this crucial issue.

The epidemic of HIV/AIDS has made a clear linkage between poverty, health, access to care and human rights. HIV is increasingly affecting women, children and young people. In the age group from 15 to 20 years, for every infected boy there are five or six infected girls. How are we to protect young women and girls against HIV/AIDS? The realization of women's sexual and reproductive rights, including their rights to information and services, are of great importance. I take this opportunity to encourage the development of national educational programmes on health issues for young girls and boys.

The involvement of civil society is crucial in achieving full gender equality. We, as representatives of Governments, must support the non-governmental organizations in their role and continue the dialogue with them. However, Governments have the primary responsibility for the implementation of the Platform for Action adopted at Beijing, as well as for the actions to be adopted here. I hope that our recommitment will lead to more accelerated actions. Gender equality and the advancement of women will continue to be major issues in the twenty-first century.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Nyam-Osor Tuya, Minister for External Relations of Mongolia.

Mrs. Tuya (Mongolia): It is indeed a privilege for me to represent Mongolia at this very special session of the General Assembly. This session is the first global conference on women's rights and gender equality to be held in the twenty-first century. We must therefore seize this opportunity not only to reaffirm our commitment to the goal of gender equality, but also to agree on specific actions and initiatives to achieve measurable progress in all areas of women's advancement, as outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action.

The Beijing Platform for Action remains the quintessential document on women's advancement and gender equality, drawing on the wisdom and experience of the twentieth century. The past century brought us a long way from emancipation to empowerment. Women live longer and healthier lives, are better schooled and have become more economically active and legally literate. Most importantly, women's rights have universally been recognized as full-fledged human rights. Important pillars for empowerment of women have been developed, such as the international Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, complemented recently by the unanimous adoption of its Optional Protocol. I am pleased to announce that Mongolia will sign this Protocol very soon and complete the ratification process within the year.

Despite all this, however, there is still a long way to go to make this world a better place for women to live in. Inequalities persist. Worldwide, women continue to bear a disproportionate burden of poverty, violence, illiteracy, dislocation, poor nutrition and ill health. Women are the first to fall victim to armed conflicts, HIV/AIDS and outrageous transnational crimes, such as trafficking in persons. We are all only too well aware of all these challenges, but far too often action lags behind rhetoric. I wish to associate myself with all those who have spoken before me in favour of better coordinated and forceful action to advance our agenda for women's empowerment, so vigorously outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action. We share the view that, here at this session, we must come up with a strong action-oriented document drawing extensively on best practices in various areas in various parts of the world.

Enabling women to become equal collaborators in and beneficiaries of development will require forging genuine partnerships between men and women; between the public sector, civil society and the private sector; as well as between affluent and poor nations.

In my own country, Mongolia, we are working to build these partnerships and to promote responsible cooperation. We have enacted new legislation and revised some older acts to mainstream gender into policies and programmes. The new Labour Code contains specific provisions prohibiting discrimination in the workplace. Women's equal rights in inheritance, land use, ownership of livestock and other property are provided for in civil and family laws. Right after the Beijing Conference, the Government of Mongolia adopted a National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women, which works in tandem with the Unemployment Reduction Programme and the National Poverty Alleviation Programme. The National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women aims at

creating equal opportunities for women and covers a number of interrelated areas, such as women's economic activities, poverty, health, education, rural women, family, women and decision-making, violence against women, human rights, the environment, national machinery and mass media.

Poverty reduction has been and still is our priority. Thus, a Women's Development Fund has been set up under the National Poverty Alleviation Programme, which has focused on income generation, especially for female-headed households, rural health and non-governmental organization capacity-building. Projects for female-headed households include pre-school strengthening components so that single mothers can engage in wage-earning activities. There are more than 40 women's non-governmental organizations operating in Mongolia and they are actively involved in the implementation of the National Poverty Alleviation Programme, especially through organizing skill-developing activities. The National Poverty Alleviation Programme works in line with the Government's development strategy and its local implementation is ensured by subprogrammes at the provincial level.

The share of the private sector in Mongolia's economy has risen from some 6 per cent 10 years ago to more than 70 per cent. Women make up half of the national workforce in Mongolia and many more are now employed in the private sector. According to Mongolia's Employers' Federation, women own more than a quarter of private enterprises in Mongolia. The overall positive impact of these activities should be gauged not only in terms of better living standards for women engaged in business, but also, and most importantly, in terms of the renewed sense of self-reliance associated with the expansion of individual initiative. We therefore believe that there should be a continued effort in the field of human resource development, including women's resources development, notably through vocational training, so that many more can benefit from opportunities offered by a market economy.

The challenges faced by women in my country include complex interrelated problems in the domains of poverty, unemployment, health, education, social protection and culture and behaviour. Women tend to have less job security as workers and less access to information and credit as entrepreneurs. They are also more likely to be poor if they are heads of households. Social dislocation, in some cases, generates frustration which, at times, translates into crime and violence, including domestic violence. As a result of complacency and silence, alcohol abuse has become a major cause of family breakdown, domestic violence, street children and neglected children, prostitution and suicide among teenagers. We think it important to learn from the experiences and best practices of other countries in dealing with these issues and in promoting zero tolerance with regard to violence against women and to step up our action to address them more vigorously, including through prevention and education.

I wish to touch briefly upon issues related to rural women. Rural women are of critical importance in agricultural production and in the rural economies of developing countries, including my own country. Of the entire female population of Mongolia, 45.1 per cent lives in rural areas, leading nomadic or semi-nomadic ways of life. The transition to a market economy has brought both opportunities and challenges to the rural population, including women. The privatization of about 30 million heads of livestock instantly turned herdsmen and herdswomen into owners, thus contributing to the improvement of their economic wealth.

But on the other hand, poor resources continue impeding rural women's and girls' access to basic social services, such as primary health care and quality education. Poor infrastructure in rural areas deprives them of access to modern information technology. We therefore believe it important to renew our commitment to the situation of rural women. A General Assembly resolution on rural women, adopted at its fifty-fourth session at the initiative of Mongolia, called for a comprehensive study on the situation of the challenges faced by rural women, including case studies and expert meetings and workshops to determine, quantify and explain the impact of globalization and poverty on rural women. Mongolia will be actively working with the relevant entities of the United Nations and fellow Members to implement the provisions of that resolution.

Strong political will and resources are the sine qua non of women's empowerment. I take the high-level participation at this session as a vivid demonstration of our political will to promote gender equality worldwide. But I believe that this will needs to be complemented by a commitment to provide

resources in a more focused way. My delegation believes that there is ample room for more effective utilization of the available resources, both domestic and external, for women's empowerment. According to a recent United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) report on the progress of the world's women, only 5 per cent of the national budgets of most countries are currently allocated to gender-specific activities. We have to allocate more, including through raising decision makers' awareness of all the potential benefits of engendering national and local budgets. The same can be applied to official development assistance. In Mongolia we are planning cooperative activities with the United Nations Development Fund for Women in the area of financing women's empowerment.

Last month we held an interesting seminar in Mongolia, supported by the United Nations Development Programme and the Swedish International Development Agency on the emerging concept of human security. The debate here at this session echoes much of our discussion at that seminar. To me this means that empowering women and ensuring gender equality means working towards ensuring human security, working together, men and women, working for the benefit of all, for the benefit of our children and grandchildren.

The President: I now call on Mrs. Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State of the United States of America.

Mrs. Albright (United States of America): I am honoured to address this landmark General Assembly session and delighted to have the opportunity to follow the Foreign Minister of Mongolia, who is part of a small but growing group of women foreign ministers. There are now 14 of us. I congratulate all who helped to organize this week's events, and all who have laboured to transform the powerful promise of the Beijing Conference into the reality of a richer, fuller and fairer life for women and girls.

Our movement to recognize and support women's rights is one of the most revolutionary and uplifting forces now shaping the world. It is liberating individuals and strengthening families, from remote villages to our largest cities. And it is still young, still blossoming, still only beginning to spread the good news of opportunity and equality for women.

This historic meeting marks another milestone in our long journey upward to justice. It enables us to assess gains made during the past five years and obliges us to chart a path that will lead to ever-more rapid progress in the new century. I am proud that I had the opportunity to join many of you at the Beijing Conference and also at Huairou, and proud to have accompanied America's First Lady, Hillary Rodham Clinton, whose very presence in Beijing made a statement and whose statement there made history.

It is no longer possible, after Beijing, to deny that women's rights are human rights and are indivisible from the universal rights of every human being. It is no longer possible, after Beijing, to conceive of development separate from the advancement of women, because no society can move ahead if half its population is held back.

It is no longer possible, after Beijing, to argue that abuses against women are merely cultural and that there is nothing any of us can do about them. Because when a woman is raped, beaten or mutilated, it is not cultural, it is criminal; and no Government, after Beijing, can deny its responsibility to stop these crimes.

The call that went forth from Beijing was a call to action, and the United States has responded. Coordinated by President Clinton's Interagency Council on Women, and in partnership with non-governmental organizations, we have moved forward as a team to fulfil the commitments we have made. For example, our Department of Health and Human Services has made new investments in the early detection and treatment of breast and cervical cancer, launched a National Women's Health Clearinghouse and waged war on HIV/AIDS.

The Department of Labor has strengthened our policies on family leave, increased our investments in childcare, helped millions of women find good jobs and encouraged employers across America to provide equal pay for equal work. The Treasury Department has expanded small-business and micro-enterprise credit, thereby helping women-owned businesses to grow in number twice as fast as those overall.

The Justice Department has combined tough new laws against domestic abuse with assistance to states and localities to help victims and prevent crimes. And we have established a 24-hour Domestic Violence Hotline, which provides crisis intervention, counselling and referrals every hour of the day in every part of our country.

We have also intensified efforts to gain our Senate's approval of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Some Senators would like us to give up, but we will not because there is no weariness in a cause that is just. Have no doubt, we will be back again and again until this Convention becomes the law of our land.

Finally, in the State Department we have placed efforts to advance the status of women and girls right where they belong: in the mainstream of American foreign policy. Through the Vital Voices Democracy Initiative we are mobilizing public- and private-sector resources and bringing women from around the world together to exchange knowledge and achieve results in support of freedom, prosperity and peace.

Through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), we are helping women bring down the barriers to political participation as advocates and voters, legislators and leaders. We are backing projects that enhance economic opportunity through greater access to credit, education and comprehensive health care.

We know that when women are able to make our own decisions, whole societies benefit, which is why our contributions to international family planning help to ease economic hardships, save women's lives, reduce the number of abortions and enable children to grow up healthy and strong.

We have also launched a major diplomatic and law-enforcement initiative to halt trafficking in human beings. This rapidly growing criminal enterprise has gone global, distorting economies, degrading societies, endangering neighbourhoods and robbing millions, mostly women and children, of their dreams.

The Clinton-Gore Administration is joining with others in an effort to stop this deadly traffic cold. Domestically, we are working with Congress to enact a strong new law that will punish perpetrators more effectively and protect and care for victims more thoroughly. Overseas, we are forging partnerships on every continent to share information, coordinate legal actions and find and close criminal networks.

This morning, I invite everyone here to join in a multi-year, multinational effort to win the fight against trafficking. If we are divided, we have no hope, but together, we will prevail. What a gift to the future that will be!

Five months ago, we crossed the threshold into a new century, amid celebration but also determination. For it is not enough to look back at how far we have come. Too many of our sisters still live surrounded by the four walls of poverty and exploitation, discrimination and conflict. Together we must strive to see that the benefits of globalization are shared not just by some people in some countries, but by all people in every country. As Hillary Clinton said on Monday,

> "When it comes to women, globalization should not mean marginalization."

Accordingly, we must redouble our efforts to make education and training in twenty-first century skills more available, so that poverty retreats and opportunity spreads around the equator and from pole to pole.

We must also learn more about the positive and negative impacts of globalization and trade on the lives of women. We do not know as much as we should and, unless we learn more, we will not be doing as much as we should to ensure that trade works for all people.

In recent years, I have had the privilege of meeting women from every corner of the world who are championing greater freedom, broader opportunity, better health, more fairness and other planks in the Beijing Platform for Action. Some of these women have been beaten back, beaten down or beaten up, but they have never been defeated because their pride is too strong and their faith in our shared cause is unshatterable.

The women's movement has flourished because of the underlying power of its central premise, which is that every individual counts. Each of us should have the knowledge and power to make our own decisions. We may make different choices about how to live, where to work and even what to wear, but we must all have the right to decide.

Our movement is not about making each woman the same. It is about recognizing and appreciating women's diversity, and about treating each individual fairly. This principle is the magnet that has brought us together across the boundaries of ethnicity and vocation, generation and gender. It is the power of this principle that enables us to envision the day when every girl, everywhere, will be able to look ahead with confidence that her life will be valued, her individuality respected, her rights protected and her

future determined solely by her own ability and character.

This is the goal we set in Beijing five years ago. That is our purpose here in New York this week, and that is the mission that will lift our spirits, guide our actions and unite our efforts in countries across the globe for many years to come. Thank you all very much for all we can do together.

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Hilda Kari, Minister for Women, Youth and Sports of Solomon Islands.

Ms. Kari (Solomon Islands): At the outset, may I, on behalf of my delegation, congratulate you, Sir, once again on your election to the presidency of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly to review and appraise the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and to recommit the international community to the principles of the Beijing Declaration. Consistency and continuity are important if women and men are to see themselves as equal partners at all levels, from the family right up to decision-making.

I would like to pay tribute to those women and men who, since 1946 and following the establishment of the Commission on the Status of Women, laboured with determination in advocating women's rights and advancement. Since then eight more conferences have been held, and this twenty-third special session is the ninth of these important international forums. I am very grateful for the opportunity to be part of this occasion, and especially to meet such women as the previous speaker, and to reflect on the achievements as well as the constraints of implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. My delegation is confident that under your able leadership, Mr. President, this event will provide the impetus for the successful implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the future.

The major constraints that hinder the successful implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in my country are obvious. Among them are the high rate of illiteracy and the lack of resources and capacity. Women constitute about 48 per cent of our population. However, only 17 per cent are literate. Access to formal education is a major problem for women. While school enrolment figures for girls are increasing, they are still among the lowest in our region. Eradication of illiteracy through education and training is key to the successful implementation of the Platform for Action in Solomon Islands in future.

Experience has shown that investment in girls' education translates directly and quickly into better nutrition for the whole family, better health care, smaller families, poverty reduction and better overall economic performance. Additionally, without financial resources and trained personnel, wider and timely implementation of women's programmes and projects at the national level, in particular in the rural areas, is a daunting task. Current economic and financial difficulties have also affected our ability to advance the women's agenda at the national level, particularly in the rural areas.

Equally important is the need for coherent coordination among the various government agencies and non-governmental organizations, including church groups. The church network in Solomon Islands reaches all communities and in many areas is the only formal assistance available. It is a crucial means through which adequate funding and programmes should be channelled and implemented to ensure that assistance reaches those in real need. Solidarity among our women will be a vital determinant of progress.

Realizing the importance of women's participation, and to facilitate the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Solomon Islands Government established the Department of Women, Youth and Sports, as well as a child-care and social welfare unit within the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development. Under the Government's general statement of policies for 1997-2001, the following elements are emphasized: the promotion and support of women's participation in decision-making and national development; encouraging policy development for women; the facilitation of appropriate training programmes for all women at all levels; the facilitation of the flow of information, communication and linkages to rural women; the coordination of women's projects and activities in government; liaison with non-governmental organizations; and the introduction of legislation to protect women's interests.

Furthermore, at the beginning of 1999 a policy matrix for women containing key result areas, policy actions, variable indicators, time-frames and responsibilities was developed. The goal is to enhance

the level of women's participation in the development process.

The most significant action was my Government's endorsement and adoption of the Solomon Islands National Women's Policy in 1999. This is a major milestone for women in my country, considering the sad fact that the policy had been rejected by past Governments six times within a period of 10 years. That policy is not only a translation of the relevant constitutional provisions, but also accommodates the 12 critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action.

While maternal and infant mortality rates have decreased, they are still high by developed world standards. The promotion of maternal and child health care and family planning through the strengthening of the maternal child health-care unit of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services will be a major component of the Government's plans. Above all, attitudes towards family planning require further improvement, and family planning services need to be made readily available.

In relation to women and human rights, the Solomon Islands national Constitution provides for equal rights and freedoms for every citizen, regardless of gender. It also embraces the principles of unity and justice. A number of women's organizations are therefore currently undertaking awareness-raising activities, educating women about their rights to protection from all forms of violence against women, especially legal rights. Similar initiatives are required to address the increasing problems of alcohol abuse, domestic and sexual violence and family break-ups. The Solomon Islands Government is committed to introducing legislation to address these problems.

Solomon Islands, a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, is striving to fulfil its obligations under the Convention. We are working closely with various organizations in advocating the rights of the child, including those of the girl child. With the establishment of a child advocacy focal point within the Department of Women, Youth and Sports, the Government will put in place activities that will promote the girl child in our society. Our national youth policy, which has recently been adopted, covers many concerns of young women and girls.

I am also pleased to announce to the Assembly that my Government has decided to accede to the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women. The instrument of accession will be deposited shortly.

Despite the efforts of my Government, women are still under-represented at policy and management levels in both the public and private sectors, non-governmental organizations and churches. There is a great need to create political awareness through the education of women to increase their participation in the political process. The media can be a useful tool in my country in this regard. In March of this year, I spoke about the communication challenge, and I appealed to the Commonwealth Secretariat to mount a special diploma programme in communication. This would be a programme to graduate young people who are articulate, have the skills and motivations of critical analysis, have technical skills and can use the new information technology, can lead public debate, can venture into investigative journalism and who understand the importance of human rights.

At the subsistence level, women continue to be the major food producers and therefore play a very important role in the agriculture and fisheries sectors. Their role in food sufficiency and food security at the family level is vital. Several initiatives are under way, including a farmer support programme that has a women's enterprise development component that directly assists women.

The current ethnic tension in my country has caused tremendous difficulties for women and children on Guadalcanal and Malaita provinces, which are two of the main islands of the country. It has resulted in the disruption of food supplies; the repatriation of women, children and their families from one province to another; the closure of medical clinics and schools, depriving them of access to health services and education; and restrictions on the movement of people. As I speak here, women and children are suffering from these tensions.

As the Minister responsible for youth, I called for peace and reconciliation in my Mother's Day message, on 14 May. Our women have also held a major conference advocating peace, and adopted a communiqué reflecting our concerns.

As a result of the ethnic tension and the increasing unemployment situation, poverty is becoming more evident, especially in Honiara, and children are the worst hit. In collaboration with the

United Nations Development Programme, the Government is currently implementing a monitoring and planning project for the vulnerable.

Finally, international policy responses to resolve the formidable challenges of globalization and to utilize its benefits must take into account the concerns and needs of women. The advancement of women must be an integral part of our efforts to revitalize international cooperation and to address the challenges together. Education, to us, is the key to effective participation in the new global economy, from primary education to lifelong learning. It is central to sustainable development, social progress and human freedom. That is why the empowerment of women is critical. That is why educating the whole population is crucial. That is why educating the girl child to be a future mother is a must.

My Government's underlying principle will continue to be partnership in development. We should take pride in having men and women as equal partners. By working together, they can make a difference in the advancement of our country.

My statement would not be complete if I failed to confess that I believe in the God who created you and me and put us on this earth to enjoy it. I would like to quote some of my favourite words from the Bible, which always give me strength, courage and hope as a woman in the world today: "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." (*1 John 5:12*) This is my very own conviction.

Lastly, I wish to take this opportunity to express my profound appreciation to the United Nations here in New York, and especially to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his conviction that men and women are equally important for the livelihood and peace of future nations. Let us all use this occasion to genuinely recommit ourselves to the principles of the Beijing Declaration, and to work collectively towards the full realization of the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action in the twenty-first century.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Romaine Ndorimana, Minister for Social and Women's Affairs of Burundi.

Mrs. Ndorimana (Burundi) (*spoke in French*): As the work of the special session of the General Assembly on the appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action proceeds here at the United Nations, I have the honour on behalf of the Government and the people of Burundi to convey to you, Mr. President, and to all participants our sincere wishes for the success of these deliberations. I hope we shall together reach conclusions that can reorient the role of women in various spheres of activity and enable them to enjoy the rights for which they have struggled for so many years, but which society has unjustly withheld.

The great gathering at Beijing to which my country traveled five years ago took place in a world context that was difficult, especially in Africa — which even now, unfortunately, heads the world in fratricidal wars, of which women and children are the main victims. Sadly, my country, Burundi, is part of that trend. Without peace, it is illusory to speak of equality and development; the absence of peace prevents the enjoyment of the most fundamental rights.

It was against the background of the grave socio-political crisis which began in 1993 — that my country participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women and worked to follow up its outcome. We hope that that crisis will soon come to an end with the signing of peace agreements. In spite of these obstacles, we have formulated a national programme of action to follow up Beijing, focusing on six priority areas: peace and culture; health; education and training; the war on poverty; women's rights and the institutional machinery to advance them; and communications. It would take too long to enumerate all that has been achieved through this process, so I shall go through the priority areas very briefly.

First, with respect to peace, Burundian women through a variety of associations have organized activities to bring about peaceful coexistence, and they have proven to be a vital part of the quest for lasting peace in Burundi.

Secondly, in the sphere of health, we have implemented programmes and initiatives focusing on a steady improvement in the lives of mothers and children. Unfortunately, not all of these efforts have been as successful as we had hoped, for the obvious reasons I mentioned a moment ago.

Thirdly, on education and training, I am obliged to note that, even though, legally speaking, there is no discrimination against girls, sociocultural obstacles continue to prevent many girls from attending school or oblige them to leave at a very early age.

Fourthly, with regard to the war on poverty, a number of initiatives to involve women at the grass-roots level, including the establishment of a production syndicate, have been undertaken by the Government, United Nations agencies and women's organizations. As elsewhere, much remains to be done: we must give fresh life to our productive capacity, which was disrupted by six years of crisis.

Turning, fifthly, to the institutional machinery for the advancement of women, my Government has ratified all international conventions guaranteeing the equality of men and women, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. We are at present working to ensure that laws on succession form part of written law rather than customary law. With respect to women's equal access to and full participation in decision-making, there has for some time been sustained advocacy by women leaders, and I can state with full certainty that gender issues are being mainstreamed thanks to action by women themselves.

Finally, as to communications, women journalists are involved in all areas where women's interests are at stake, which has already brought about a positive change in the media's portrayal of women.

As I have briefly indicated, Burundi has not addressed the implementation of the entire Beijing Platform for Action, for the obvious reasons I mentioned earlier, but especially because of the embargo that neighbouring countries unjustly imposed against my country between 31 July 1996 and 23 January 1999. The harmful effects of that embargo can still be felt today, well after it was suspended. This situation has had multifaceted consequences; it nullified what we had worked so hard to achieve in all sectors of national life. The post-Beijing appraisal is taking place in a world characterized by social inequality and by increased poverty in developing countries.

I cannot conclude without reminding the international community, and principally the United Nations, of how urgent it is to resume cooperation with Burundi and to provide determined support to the women of Burundi in their endeavours to improve life in their country. Even at the height of the crisis, it has been women, mainly as heads of household, who have had to ensure the survival of our people, leaving the camps and returning to the land. Burundi is essentially an agricultural country, and these women have had to feed the many children orphaned by war and by the AIDS pandemic. These women deserve support also, so they will not think their efforts on all fronts simultaneously are being ignored.

In our view, these deliberations should provide an opportunity to continue our action to strengthen international solidarity, especially with women's organizations. The Assembly should propose specific measures to close the gap between rich countries and poor countries; it should forever eradicate gender discrimination and violence against women; it should propose measures to promote education, especially women's education; and it should consolidate the attainments made in the area of women's rights.

I wish for the success of our deliberations. Women the world over look forward to meeting the challenges they face at the beginning of this new millennium.

Mrs. Al-Barwany (Oman): On behalf of the delegation of the Sultanate of Oman, it is with honour and great pride that I present Oman's post-Beijing positive experience and reaffirm our commitment to the Platform for Action.

Oman's development history in the modern context started in 1970, with the accession to the throne of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said. Since then, Oman has moved from a primarily rural society to a prosperous modern State. By 1995, the situation of girls and women had undergone a remarkable transformation, especially with regard to the basic quality-of-life indicators. The pre-Beijing review process highlighted the need to focus more attention on girls and women in their own right and as increasingly active partners in the public domain. Issues such as visibility in data, personal status, social, economic and political participation were given priority. The need to review and refine policy approaches and support structures for women and girls was at the forefront of our agenda. As a result, Oman's fifth Five-year Development Plan, formulated before the finalization of the Beijing Platform for Action, had proactively addressed several gender concerns.

Allow me to highlight here a few of Oman's significant achievements. In health care and quality of life indicators, a reduction in mortality rates and an increased life expectancy due to universal access to maternal and child health services have been attained.

Health education campaigns have resulted in a successful birth-pacing programme that has reduced the fertility rate from 7.8 per cent to 4.7 per cent in the last five years. A steep increase in the contraception prevalence rate to 40.4 per cent, and the rising female age of marriage have both had an impact on reducing the population growth rate. There have been similarly striking advances for girls in the context of educational access and attainment, whereby in 1997-1998 female enrolment made up 48.5 per cent of the total school enrolment. A significant number of girls are going on to tertiary levels, outpacing and outperforming boys in many areas. Parallel gains were recorded in the adult literacy rate as a result of efforts to expand and strengthen female literacy programmes, particularly in rural areas. A number of activities, including workshops, curriculum reform and communication initiatives, have been successful in increasing gender awareness.

The Sultanate's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1996 added impetus to the strengthening of the girl-child focus, and subsequent awareness campaigns were launched to publicize and promote children's rights. Women's enhanced participation in all fields of national development is being actively promoted, with public proclamations from the highest level and a demonstrated Government interest resulting in positive civil service rules that place, promote and create training opportunities for women. Initiatives to increase women's participation in the labour market have yielded substantial dividends, with the numbers in civil service going up from 19 per cent in 1994 to 26 per cent in 1998, with women being promoted to senior levels. Alhough the largest concentration of women is still in health and education, the recent move into fields such as engineering, marketing and finance has given women greater access to private sector job opportunities. Government training programmes and poverty reduction schemes centre on increasing women's economic self-reliance through income-generating programmes and increased access to soft loans. Efforts to build female skills and competencies have enabled their entry into diverse fields, including entrepreneurship.

In the field of participation and decision-making, both the State Council and the Consultative Council included women upon their inception. Today, I am a proud to say that 29 women are candidates for the upcoming Consultative Council elections, and we have high hopes that their increased representation will reflect greater participation by women. I must hasten to add that the right to vote for the Consultative Council has already been granted to Omani women.

Concerted efforts have been directed at ensuring a wider participation of women in local-level decision-making on community issues. The organized non-governmental organizations sector is still at an initial stage in Oman. However, efforts to expand the scope of activities and strengthen their management capacity have led to an increase in the number of women's associations from 17 to 25 in the last five years. A significant step forward in this respect has been the establishment of the Coordination Committee for Women's Voluntary Work, with a key role in coordinating, planning and researching women-related issues.

Positive constitutional and legal provisions advocate women's involvement in the public and personal spheres. Gender equality, in accordance with the tenets of Islamic shariah, is an underlying principle of the Omani Basic Law of the State and the Personal Status Law. The aforementioned pieces of legislation were drafted with special attention given to the empowerment of women through their rights derived from shariah law, and this has led to considerable headway in advancing principles embodied in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. With enlightened leadership, strong political will and support, Omani women need only take advantage of and utilize the opportunities made available to them.

Five years can be an adequate period of time for accelerated development, or just a wasted moment in the history of nations. In the context of the Beijing Platform for Action, Oman's experience has been a cause for much jubilation. Yet it is recognized that we need to make further efforts to sustain and reinforce our accomplishments.

In order to address our unfinished agenda, specific future actions are being formulated to address under-reporting in national statistics; to change perceptions about women's role; and increase awareness of better living concepts and productive options. Improving the quality of education and making it relevant to girls is a priority, while special attention

is being given to improving the nutritional status of women and girls.

New socio-economic challenges are being faced as changing patterns in lifestyle are bringing about rapid accelerations in urbanization and consumerism. Information outreach programmes to increase developmental options for rural women are being formulated in this context, and capacity-building in general has taken on a more meaningful role.

To ensure the sustainability of progress made, and to build on achievements for further development, the Government of the Sultanate of Oman is committed to continuing its implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and to working in cooperation with the relevant bodies of the United Nations system to realize a promising future for Omani women and for all women of the world.

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Jarmila Moravek de Cerruto, Vice-Minister for Gender and Family Affairs of Bolivia.

Mrs. Moravek de Cerruto (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of my country and my Government, I would like to begin by expressing to you, Mr. President, our congratulations on your leadership of this grand event, the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women in the Year 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

In a global context of dizzying and contradictory changes that make it difficult to have a clear understanding of reality, the women of the world are meeting to share the progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, adopted without reservation by 189 countries.

In the past five years, women's struggle to gain respect for their human rights has developed within the framework of a globalized world in which poverty is worsening as a result of an unfair distribution and concentration of income: 15 per cent of the population of the world earns 85 per cent of the income, while the other 85 per cent earns only 15 per cent. Unfortunately, the same applies to the resources and wealth necessary for development. There is, therefore, a dramatic, marked difference between rich and poor countries. As the Minister for Foreign Relations of Bolivia stated during the general debate in the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session, for the less developed countries globalization is a threat, because poverty, unemployment and corruption are also being globalized on a massive scale.

In this rather negative general context, despite the progress made towards the attainment of full citizenship rights and development for women, we must acknowledge that there are still many obstacles. Implementing the Platform for Action will require greater political will, increased economic and financial resources and better institutional capacity-building.

Today, few can ignore women's rights, and no one can doubt the contribution of women to the development of nations. We are also convinced that the greatest obstacle for developing countries are the political and economic limitations on our States in applying sustainable social programmes to ensure not only the reduction of poverty, but the effective incorporation of the gender perspective into policy-making and the rights of women, as a non-negotiable and inherent condition of a new type of human development.

In Bolivia, governmental actions designed to create conditions to empower women and to ensure the full exercise of their rights and their access to power have contributed to the development of public policies in this respect, but they are not yet sufficient to integrate women completely into all stages of development with equality of opportunity.

In an environment of profound change in the relationship between the State and civil society, efforts and resources are being brought together for a joint endeavour to overcome gender inequality. Mobilizing Bolivian women and institutionalizing women's issues in the State structure are opening up areas in different parts of society, granting validity and importance to an area that has so much to do with strengthening democracy and ensuring development based on equality in diversity.

In fulfilling the objectives of the global Platform for Action, we have made important achievements in the judicial, legal and normative spheres. At the State level, the search for gender equality in the field of education essentially takes the form of incorporating the issue into the entire education reform process, while critically appraising the roles of men and women in different areas of life and highlighting the overall development of their potential. The strategic health programme includes specific plans and projects

relating to sexual and reproductive health. The decision to reduce mortality rates by providing basic health insurance coverage for miscarriages during the first six months of pregnancy is an advance of fundamental importance.

Violence is no longer a private affair; it is now covered by public policies. The law against family or domestic violence and the Supreme Decree on equality of opportunity for men and women provide the legal framework that defines family violence and discrimination on the basis of gender as matters for the State. Likewise, the National Plan for preventing and eradicating violence against women, which is considered to be the national strategy, establishes integral services for the prevention of violence and comprehensive care for women in situations of violence.

With the strategic objective of achieving equal and lasting access for women to power structures, specific laws have been introduced in the national legal bodies, including the electoral code and the laws governing political parties and municipalities. As a result, there has been a significant increase in women's participation in municipal councils, from 9.5 per cent in 1995 to 42.1 per cent in 1999.

Such achievements have been made in the legal area in particular, but the same cannot be said of cultural patterns and practices. Bolivia would therefore like to raise several points at this important session. In order to better implement the global Platform for Action in the medium term, we consider it essential to ratify the consensus obtained in 1995 at the global level and to incorporate regional factors that emerged from the evaluation processes. In this context, Bolivia would like to state firmly that it has adhered to the agreements reached at the eighth Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, which took place in Lima in February this year.

It is of vital importance that the States that have not yet signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women do so as soon as possible. Only thus will we be able to demonstrate a greater political will and commitment to reducing the distance between formal and factual reality and thereby allow women the real and total exercise of their rights.

We exhort the developed countries to make genuine efforts to obtain a fair and equitable distribution of the world's wealth. Similarly, we urge the developing countries of our region and the world to define a current of thought and action that will enhance the sovereignty and self-determination of our nations.

So long as women continue to die for preventable reasons; so long as segregation for reasons of gender and violence in its various forms and expressions persist; so long as attempts continue to be made to justify cultural and religious practices, such as genital mutilation, that infringe upon the fundamental rights of women, we will not be able to speak of equality, development or peace.

Finally, we summon the peoples of the world, the Governments of the world and, especially, the women of the world to join forces to overcome the obstacles encountered over the course of these past five years, in the hope of launching a new millennium that will lead us to the construction of ever more democratic, just and equitable societies.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Aksoltan Ataeva, Chairperson of the delegation of Turkmenistan.

Mrs. Ataeva (Turkmenistan) (*spoke in Russian*): Permit me to greet all the participants of the current session and all those who made a contribution to achieving progress in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. I wish them further success.

Having won independence, pondered our history and traditions and organically linked them to present-day realities, we have elaborated our own model of statehood that corresponds to the national mentality and traditions of the Turkmen people and the universal principles of mankind. They have become the basis for building a democratic, law-governed secular State, an independent and neutral Turkmenistan.

Issues of the family and of women's social and economic status hold a special place in our country. They have acquired renewed prominence and relevance under the impact of modernization processes that are under way throughout the world. In spite of the diverse and exceptional complexity of the tasks facing our newly independent State, President Saparmurat Niyazov and the Government have identified women's problems and constitutional status, support of motherhood and protection of the family as top priorities of State policy.

The development of all social institutions, ranging from state governance to scientific and social organizations, and the further democratization of society are inseparably linked to ensuring women's equality. The Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women has been implemented in a number of state-wide programmes relating to the education, health and social and economic status of women in Turkmenistan. The Constitution and laws of the country grant women equal rights with men in all spheres of economic, political, cultural and social life. They guarantee women not only equal, but often preferential rights.

Mr. Jordán-Pando (Bolivia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

For many centuries, the Turkmen people have held high the authority of the institution of the family and the dissolution of a family is therefore considered to be an exceptional occasion. The family helps form the high moral principles that are traditional for the Turkmen people: modesty, industry and respect for the mother and elders of the family.

The laws of the country guarantee women equal opportunities for realizing their aspirations in running the affairs of the State as well as in public and economic matters. The 1999 elections to the *Medjlis* of Turkmenistan and local organs of power bore witness to the democratic processes under way in the country. Their results show that women account for 26 per cent of all elected officials.

In December 1995, Turkmenistan adopted the Declaration on International Obligations in the Field of Human Rights and Freedoms and brought its legislation into line with international instruments by ratifying and acceding to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Political Rights of Women and others. The system of standards ensuring the legal status of women is based on the democratic principle of the rule of law. This key principle of democratic society is an indispensable element of equality for all citizens, regardless of gender.

Turkmenistan has created a large-scale and diverse system of material and social benefits to support motherhood and children, women who have many children and single mothers. These benefits include the payment of social subsidies to families with many children; the sale of foodstuffs at State-subsidized prices; free electricity, gas and water; the lowest possible rent for apartments; free secondary and higher education; supplementary paid maternity leave; paid leave for childcare, and so on. The State allocates 40 to 50 per cent of its budget to the social sphere in order to enhance the effectiveness of social programmes.

Considerable progress has been achieved in educating women, 98 per cent of whom receive education, including over 41 per cent with higher education. Access to education is open because it is free. As private property and entrepreneurship take root in the country, it is becoming necessary to teach women the basics of business, new technologies and alternative forms of education. To that end, numerous business schools and education courses have been opened, including computer classes. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the National Bureau for Women in Development are providing considerable help in this sphere.

The State system of public health, financed almost entirely from the country's budget, ensures the implementation of most programmes affecting every aspect of women's health. They include the State Health Programme; programmes for the protection of motherhood and children; joint programmes with UNDP, the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Population Fund, aimed primarily at promoting a healthy way of life, preventing diseases and encouraging breastfeeding and reproductive health. We highly appreciate the activities and help of the United Nations in addressing gender-related issues.

The environment is one of the most important factors in improving people's health. The Government of my country has adopted a programme for providing the people with safe water and the steady implementation of this programme has helped to reduce the incidence of infectious diseases and to eliminate sources of infection, and thus to reduce mortality among children.

We cannot consider the problem of the role and place of women in contemporary society to be entirely resolved in our country. The radical transformation of the social system and the change in social guidelines and incentives have created certain difficulties. Genuine freedom, the involvement of women in complex processes, their active role in building a democratic society and the good governance of the

country require a high level of social and legal culture and the establishment of a proactive attitude to help women to counter old stereotypes of their role and place in the family and social life.

The women's social movement, formed under the new democratic conditions, has contributed to the enhancement of the public role and authority of women. It is working together with non-governmental organizations, such as the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United States Agency for International Development, and cooperating with international women's organizations.

In reaffirming his commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action, President Saparmurat Niyazov of Turkmenistan is guiding the policy of enhancing women's role in society in order to attain these goals. He once said that our people dearly respect the honour and dignity of our women, and it is our duty to mothers, wives and daughters to ensure a dignified life, stability and prosperity for our women.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I call on Ms. Rosalyn Hazelle, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Community, Social Development and Gender Affairs of Saint Kitts and Nevis.

Ms. Hazelle (Saint Kitts and Nevis): On behalf of the Government and the people of Saint Kitts and Nevis, I take this opportunity to congratulate the President on his able leadership of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. I am assured that with his skills and experience, he will guide us to a successful conclusion of this historic meeting.

I welcome this opportunity to commend the Commission on the Status of Women and the Division for the Advancement of Women for their untiring efforts for the convening of this very important special session. This session allows for the timely appraisal of steps taken to implement the Beijing Platform for Action and to reiterate my Government's commitments.

The Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis, being fully committed to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and desirous of prioritizing the realization of gender equity, development and peace in our society, undertook, with the assistance of civil society, a wide-ranging review of the status of our women. This was done with a view to establishing how our policies and laws promoted gender equality and equity, and was initiated using a rights-based approach. The review process highlighted significant achievements in the elimination of many forms of direct discrimination with regard to women's access to education, health and social security and to their overt support for and participation in the electoral process. Legislative and policy gaps were also highlighted in areas such as violence against women and poverty.

Of the critical areas identified in the Beijing Platform for Action, the Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis concentrated on the following: violence against women and girls, women and poverty, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, women's health and women in leadership and decision-making positions.

Following this review, an integrated gender and development plan was developed and incorporated into the macroeconomic planning framework. Through this five-year plan, my Government committed itself to a gender analysis and planning component of all development policies and programmes.

To ensure a systematic and coordinated approach to gender-sensitive policies and programmes, the Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis implemented a Gender Management System, which resulted in the strengthening and formalizing of linkages between the Ministry with responsibility for women's affairs and other ministries. The Gender Management System has facilitated the training of senior policy makers and planners in gender analysis and planning, and continues to be critical in the building of institutional capacity within the Ministry responsible for women's affairs. This was done with the assistance of the Commonwealth Secretariat and was largely due to an enabling environment, the most important component being political will. In fact, our implementation of the Commonwealth Secretariat Gender Budget Initiative to assess the potential differential impact on our national budget was instigated by the Prime Minister, in his capacity as Minister of Finance.

Recognizing that women needed to be empowered to articulate their needs and concerns, my Government launched a campaign to increase women's participation at all levels. The campaign provided training to women through educational and other advocacy tools to strengthen women's leadership capacity and skills and to increase public sensitivity in this area. This commitment has resulted in a significant

increase in the number of women in senior positions within the civil service.

With respect to violence against women and girls, legislative amendments have been enacted which increase the penalties for all forms of sexual abuse. This legal development mirrors a widespread awareness of the seriousness of such forms of abuse. Further, this year the Domestic Violence Act was passed by our Parliament. This Act increases women's legal options and ensures access to the courts for the purpose of seeking protective relief from all forms of domestic abuse.

These two legislative advances in the area of violence against women and girls are concrete expressions of the commitment of my Government to guarantee to all women and girls the full protection of the law from all forms of abuse, whether they occur in the public or the private sphere.

Legal reform is most effective when accompanied by changes in the culture and attitudes of all citizens and public personnel. To this end, my Government has instituted mandatory gender-sensitive modules on human rights and violence against women and girls within the police training programmes. In addition, we have provided training to health personnel, guidance counsellors and child-care workers to enhance their capacity to provide supportive and gender-sensitive services to victims of violence.

The Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis has also sought specifically to extend reproductive health programmes and services for all women. In the context of a relatively high prevalence of breast and cervical cancers in the Caribbean region, breast examinations and cervical cancer screenings have been instituted.

Adolescent mothers can discern our commitment to the reproductive health of, and rights and services for, women and the girl child from the Government's commitment to work hard to eliminate the discriminatory attitude towards attendance at school.

My Government has sought to meet the housing needs associated with natural disasters by building 1,200 housing units since 1995, of which the majority has been allocated to women.

We wish to take this opportunity to call on the international community to take account of the economic and physical vulnerability of small island developing States in the formulation of development indices as well as international cooperation.

As my Government continues to meet the challenge of ensuring the elimination of all forms of gender discrimination and the advancement of social equity and justice, it is doing so in an environment of limited economic resources. We wish to echo the concerns, some of which are contained in the Lima Consensus, that economic globalization, external debt and the erosion of trade preferential margins have had negative impacts on the lives and situation of women, particularly those of the small island developing States. It is our request that concerns regarding the issues that impact on developing countries in general, and those of the Caribbean Community in particular, form part of the deliberations that will ensue during the convening of the Millennium Summit.

Without question, certain material gains have been made in advancing social justice and gender equity. There are still, however, challenges ahead, and many of these are related to the need to change the cultural relations of gender. We understand that the root causes of violence against women and the unequal sharing of family responsibilities are directly related to the construction of forms of masculinity which prioritize cultures of dominance and power over cultures of peace.

During this millennial year, we look forward to the adoption of further initiatives and programmes which will advance the goals of development, gender equality and peace.

In closing, I wish to repeat the words of the Secretary-General:

> "We are not guests on this planet. We belong here." (*A/S-23/PV.1*)

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Abylabek Asankanov of the Office of the President of Kyrgyzstan.

Mr. Asankanov (Kyrgyzstan) (*spoke in Russian*): On behalf of my delegation, let me congratulate His Excellency Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab on his assumption of the presidency of this historic special session on gender equality, development and peace. I would like to express our hope that, under his able leadership, the outcome of the special session will be successful.

Let me also express special thanks to the Preparatory Committee for the enormous efforts they made during the extremely difficult preparatory process. The main objective of this important session is comprehensively to review and appraise the progress achieved in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and ensure that the commitments undertaken by the Member States are fully realized.

The twentieth century was a time of unprecedented social transformations and political upheavals, all of them large-scale and with almost immediate impact. The women of Kyrgyzstan, as all those in Asia, have, within a relatively short period of time, lived through unprecedented and far-reaching events with longterm consequences.

The women of Kyrgyzstan play a leading role in family life, and they have shown a high level of skill and ability in resolving the difficult problems related to social life. It is with pride that I mention here today that the Kurmanjan Datka — the "Alai queen" and famous Kyrgyz governor — was respected by all the foreign rulers she met during her reign, even by Kokand Khan, the guardian of Muslim norms in the nineteenth century. At that time, it was considered astounding that a woman could govern such a huge territory as the Ferghana valley, which encompasses the areas of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

With its recent accession to independence, the transition to a market economy and the democratization of its society, Kyrgyzstan has been going through a fundamental and radical reorganization of its social structure. The women of Kyrgyzstan are now experiencing extremely difficult socio-economic conditions. Active measures are being undertaken to eliminate poverty and unemployment and to bring more women into the social sphere.

The 12 critical areas of concern in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action are playing a major role in advancing the status of women. A number of radical and strategic measures have been adopted by the Government to this end.

By decree of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, Askar Akayev, 1996 was proclaimed the Year of the Woman; and the "Ayalzat" national programme — a word that means "women" — was elaborated and approved. This programme includes obligations in the twelve critical areas and assistance from the Government budget towards their implementation. In addition, women's initiative centres on the implementation of the "Ayalzat" programme have been established in various regions of Kyrgyzstan.

The State Commission on Family, Women and Youth affairs, created by the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, includes in its structure the newly established Women's Institute. Commissions on the family and women's issues have been set up in both Chambers of Parliament. Five international conventions on women's issues, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, have been ratified.

Parliamentarian hearings have been organized on women's issues, and in the legislative area a review has been carried out of a draft on gender equality — in other words, a legal basis for advancement of women is being developed. Since 1998, a new stage has begun in the process of the achievement of gender equality: the President of the Kyrgyz Republic established the National Council on Gender Policy.

In the last five years, more than 100 women's non-governmental organizations have been created, many of which are now participating at the international level. A number of conferences and seminars on human rights have been held, with the active support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other international organizations. Faculties, departments, schools and centres for research on gender issues have been created.

In 1999 Kyrgyzstan, in a timely manner, submitted to the Secretary-General of the United Nations its first national report on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. In 2000 Kyrgyzstan become a member of the United Nations Commission on the Advancement of Women.

I wish to take this opportunity to express our deep gratitude to international organizations — UNDP, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the World Health Organization and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, among others — for their strong support of the efforts of Kyrgyz women and for their actions to implement the principles of gender equality.

A new mode of interrelating is emerging among the Kyrgyz people owing to the transition to a market economy. The culture of business and finance is developing, the motivation to become self-employed is increasing, and dependence upon the Government is diminishing.

A great psychological transformation in the cultural psyche, and especially in women's minds, has occurred during this period of transition because of issues of economic security.

The Kyrgyz Government and civil society are undertaking broad and concrete measures to strengthen the status of women. We understand that the leadership of every country has a responsibility to care for its people and its women as a part of society. But sometimes there are circumstances that make it impossible for a country to overcome its problems on its own.

In this regard, I would like to mention that last year some religious extremists suddenly penetrated the border of our country, took local and foreign people hostage, killed Japanese and Kyrgyz civilians and occupied part of our territory. All these events took place in the Batken region. Due to the events in Batken, the social and economic conditions in Kyrgyzstan worsened. The conflict in Batken left dozens of widows and orphans; their losses were intolerable, and much damage occurred that could not be compensated.

New difficulties in the areas of education, health, employment and other spheres have arisen. I have to admit that the vulnerable, newly established democracy in Kyrgyzstan does not have sufficient resources to overcome these problems. We therefore need broad support from the international community to deal with these challenges.

In spite of all the difficulties we face today, the Government of my country will continue its efforts further to realize the Beijing Platform for Action. The implementation of economic and political reforms in Kyrgyzstan will include the establishment of gender equality and equal opportunity.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the Chairperson of the delegation of Ecuador, Her Excellency Mrs. María Isabel Baquerizo de Noboa.

Mrs. Baquerizo de Noboa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): The objective of the Fourth World Conference on Women, which was held at Beijing in September 1995, was to review and update strategies aimed at the advancement of women. Ecuador resolutely assumed that commitment and took into consideration women's demands to design the equal opportunity plan for the period 1996-2000, which constitutes the cross-cutting technical tool that guides all areas of public policy to promote the development of programmes and projects benefiting women and the girl child.

In the area of institutional mechanisms, the National Women's Council was created as a body accountable to the presidency of the country, thereby placing it at the highest political level. It is made up of representatives of the Government and civil society. It is worth emphasizing the close relationship between the State and the women's movement, which together promote the advancement of women and the well-being of their families. That joint effort produced its most significant success after the extraordinary political negotiations that made it possible for the large majority of women's specific collective rights to be included in the new Constitution of the Republic, which has been in effect since 1998.

The current crisis in the country affects Ecuadorian women in particular, diminishing their options for subsistence and personal well-being. This is one of the main obstacles impeding the achievement of person-centred development, and it threatens the progress made in bringing about gender equality.

It is for this reason that the current Government is implementing a social emergency plan that contains focused policies whose principal beneficiaries are women from the poorest sectors of society. The greatest effort is oriented towards the greatest challenges, namely, developing employment and income-generating policies and programmes, improving access to resources for rural and indigenous women and strengthening the women's movement and women's organizations.

Despite the current problems, significant gains have been made in the legislative arena since 1995 with regard to the rights of women, and various policies favouring women have been enacted. Mechanisms to promote participation by civil society in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of public

polici s on gender have been expanded. The regulating body of those mechanisms is the National Women's Council, which has strengthened womens' status as citizens and consolidated important equity-ensuring processes during this period.

I wish to emphasize that this new initiative includes the implementation and upcoming setting into motion of the law on cost-free maternity, which provides for pre-natal, parturition and post-partum medical attention, and medical check-ups for children from birth to five years of age. In this way we hope to reduce maternal and infant mortality and enable women to exercise their right to be cared for at a health centre in order to ensure they can successfully bring their pregnancy to term. We also hope that this will serve to promote recognition of the importance of the role of women in the care and protection of their children, to protect the family as the basis of society and help in the detection of such illnesses as cancer and AIDS.

We have also implemented the law on political quotas, which requires that women make up 30 per cent of candidate lists for elections to public office. I am sure that this very important objective will give rise to new leadership and new political practices in Ecuador as it consolidates its democracy.

There are currently 22 women's centres in Ecuador, located in every province. They are modelled on non-governmental organizations, and their work is strengthened by the ongoing technical assistance provided by the National Women's Council and is carried out under the aegis of a government ministry. The centres' operations and services have resulted in a discernible drop in the level of family abuse. Their accomplishments, which have already been evaluated, have had a positive impact on the daily lives of many Ecuadorian families.

I believe that the Member States of the United Nations, non-governmental organizations, international bodies and international financial institutions in particular, together with civil society, are called on today more than ever before to support Governments in their efforts to implement the Beijing Platform for Action so that more women and girls will have access to knowledge and new technologies — which are necessary tools for joining the workforce — and so that they will be able to substantially improve their quality of life and have their rights respected.

Ecuador, for its part, is resolved to make those rights a reality. To that end, we hope to be able to count on the necessary international cooperation.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jemat Haji Ampal, Chairman of the delegation of Brunei Darussalam to the United Nations.

Mr. Jemat (Brunei Darussalam): I take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab on his election as President of the General Assembly at this special session. We look forward to a very successful session under his wise and skilful guidance.

As our Minister for Foreign Affairs has stated before the General Assembly on several occasions, Brunei Darussalam wishes to give the United Nations every support in its efforts to improve the day-to-day lives of ordinary people and to bring direct benefits to their families and communities. Ensuring that women realize their full human potential is an essential aspect of that work. As the Secretary-General said earlier in this session, empowering women not only means better lives for women; it means better lives for everyone on the planet, men and women alike. We therefore appreciate the opportunity afforded us at this session to review what has been achieved since the Beijing Conference.

In that spirit, I would like to report briefly on the progress we have made so far in Brunei Darussalam in fulfilling United Nations recommendations in this area. We have recognized the overall need to institute policies that are not gender-biased. As a result, we have been benefiting considerably from the impact Brunei women are making in all aspects of national development. This is especially so in education, where we have seen a marked increase in the number of female students enrolled in our tertiary educational institutions. The total enrolment of women students in tertiary education increased from just over 50 per cent in 1994 to nearly 70 per cent in 1997. We now have a situation in which women outnumber men at our institutions of higher education. In addition, school enrolment, from pre-school upwards, is virtually universal.

In terms of employment, national policy has led to increased job opportunities for women, and these have been accompanied by a marked shift in social attitudes towards the professional standing of women.

Equal job opportunities now exist in the civil service and have been matched by equal pay.

In economic development, women in Brunei Darussalam are playing a very important role in our national plan. The percentage of women in the labour force has steadily increased over the past five years and is now well over 50 per cent. At the same time, the Government and non-governmental and private organizations have recognized the needs of working mothers and have taken measures to counter possible adverse effects on families. In private enterprises, women are extremely active in business ventures, both locally and abroad. In this field, the Government also provides equal incentives to men and women and has particularly encouraged women to develop their own small and medium-sized enterprises into high-tech and knowledge-based industries.

In the light of these positive developments, Brunei Darussalam is very pleased to be hosting the meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Women Leaders Network 2000 in 10 days' time. The theme of the meeting is small to medium enterprises as global traders, and participants will be looking closely at the challenges and opportunities arising from globalization.

We have also made progress in the provision of health care that is cost-effective and is accessible to both men and women. Preventive and promotive health-care programmes, especially for women, are given high priority. These include education about reproductive health, safe motherhood, female-related cancers, heart disease and general nutrition. In addition, thanks to programmes designed to promote antenatal care, breastfeeding and nutritional advice for mothers, we have seen a decline in infant mortality rates. Overall, the life expectancy of women in our country at present is 78 years, compared to 73 years for men.

To protect the welfare of women, children and families, the Government of Brunei Darussalam recently introduced the emergency married women order and the guardianship of infants order of 1999. This protects the rights of those women not covered by the Islamic family law, and includes maintenance for wives and children. These policies are complemented by measures adopted by the Islamic shariah court, which also reflect a nationwide concern for the welfare of women under modern conditions.

The Government is also in the process of introducing a children and young persons act which will protect girls and young women below 18 years of age from discrimination, abuse and neglect. Strong legislation has existed since 1972 to protect women and girls against sexual exploitation, and offences against women and girls are treated extremely seriously. Further legislation and plans of action are also being considered to increase levels of protection for women even further.

We are by no means satisfied that we have provided women in our country with all that they require or with the total social protection that is their right. However, I can assure the Assembly that we are conscious of the need to be constantly vigilant in this area. We are ready to join the rest of the international community under the guidance of the United Nations to ensure that women are fully able to realize their potential as happy and productive individuals in our society and as the living heart of our families.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to Ms. Liz Gordon, Member of Parliament, House of Representatives of New Zealand.

Ms. Gordon (New Zealand): It is an honour to address the General Assembly at this special session on an issue as important to the Government of New Zealand as gender equality, development and peace for our new century. We welcome this opportunity to affirm our commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as the fundamental blueprint for the achievement of women's equality. Through review and appraisal of our efforts since Beijing we can see where progress has been made. We can also see where obstacles have prevented us from moving forward and can use our collective knowledge and creativity to find strategies for overcoming them.

In many areas, there has been significant progress for women around the world since Beijing, and since Nairobi before it. The efforts of Governments, United Nations agencies, regional and international organizations, non-governmental organizations and civil society in general to implement the Platform have had real results in improving the status of women.

But it is equally clear that we have a long way to go. Women continue to suffer discrimination because of their gender. They suffer disproportionately from the effects of poverty and armed conflict. They continue to encounter barriers to justice and to the enjoyment of

their human rights because of such factors as their race, age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation, disability or socio-economic status, or their status as indigenous people, migrants, displaced persons or refugees.

Building on our commitments at Beijing, and on what we have learned since then, we must continue to set new goals and identify new measures for women's equality and empowerment. Where new factors that affect women's equality and attainment of the full realization of their human rights have emerged, the same commitment and creativity must be applied to addressing these.

New Zealand remains committed to the protection and promotion of women's rights as human rights, and to its obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In particular, the New Zealand Government has expressed its intention to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention, which will be a key tool for women in fully realizing their human rights. The Convention provides the underlying legal framework for achieving the goals of Beijing. We urge those States that have not ratified the Convention to do so.

In encouraging gender equity it is important that nation-States are just as honest about the challenges they face as about their successes. Only in that way will Governments and international institutions find solutions that take fully into account the effects of their policies on women.

Since 1995, New Zealand has continued to undergo significant social and economic changes, which have continued to have an impact on the status and development potential of women, and especially women who face more than one form of disadvantage. New Zealand's commitment to ending remaining gender-based discrimination and to promoting the rights of women remains high on the Government's agenda. In particular, attention is being given to achieving women's economic independence as a basis for empowering women in all areas where equality is yet to be achieved.

Working women in New Zealand earn about 80 per cent of the average male wage. The gender pay gap appears to be widening for female graduates, a trend that coincides with an increase in women's participation in tertiary education. Although the pay gap has narrowed for the lowest paid, this relates to men's wages falling rather than to women's wages rising.

In one crucial area, the gender pay gap has closed: our Parliament has a woman Prime Minister, a woman leader of the opposition and 10 female ministers, while a total of 30 per cent of our elected representatives are women, not to mention the Chief Justice of New Zealand. Thus, women now play a critical leadership role. Nevertheless, there remain in place policies which may appear equal, but which have unequal effects for women. One example is that while our legislation provides for the equal division of matrimonial property, in its application it has proved inadequate in recognizing the unvalued contributions of women to a relationship. My Government is currently addressing this issue, as well as that of ensuring equitable property settlements in the dissolution of de facto and same-sex relationships.

A further example is that student loans cost women more than men as a result of women's pay differential with men. Although they may borrow the same amount, women take longer to pay off their loans than men, and thus pay more interest.

Like all developed nations, New Zealand's economy relies heavily on women's participation at the productive and reproductive level, both in paid employment and as mothers. The New Zealand Government is committed to equal employment opportunity legislation that provides a framework which enables women to achieve their full potential as citizens, and discussions are under way in order to institute a new system of paid parental leave.

Increasing awareness and more concerted action to address violence against women as a violation of their human rights has been a key success since Beijing. Whether it is violence within the home, as is 80 per cent of violence in New Zealand, or that associated with armed conflict, the underlying social and economic causes must be addressed if we are to find real solutions. It is women and children who bear the brunt of violent conflict. Women are left to deal with the consequences of battles which they often have no part in conducting. Despite this, they are often deprived of a place at the peace table and a decision-making role in post-conflict reconstruction.

More must be done to recognize the role of women as peace makers. In our own region, women

took a leading role in bringing to a close nine years of secessionist conflict on the island of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea.

We welcome the adoption of the Rome Statute for the establishment of the International Criminal Court, which recognizes gender-related crimes as war crimes and crimes against humanity. Legislation is currently before the New Zealand Parliament to enable us to ratify the Statute.

The Platform also provides for action to address the particular needs and situation of indigenous women around the world. The New Zealand Government is committed to looking at ways to close the social and economic gaps between Maori — the indigenous people of New Zealand — and non-Maori women, and minimizing the risk of further gaps developing. The Prime Minister, Helen Clark, is leading this work.

Over time, Maori women have felt the impact of economic restructuring of the industries and occupations they work in. A decline in job opportunities for Maori women and increased responsibilities as single parents have combined to limit Maori women's access to employment, with a consequent impact on the socio-economic status of Maori women and their communities. Many Maori women have sought their own economic empowerment through a range of small and medium-sized enterprises. Many run their own businesses or take an increasing part in professions including the law, medicine and training.

The Government is also driving a regional approach to economic development and job creation in New Zealand. This process will rely on the input and expertise of women from all ethnic and social backgrounds, and will ensure that the end result truly reflects the broad needs of the entire community. Finally, New Zealand welcomes the positive contribution the Commonwealth is making towards advancing the role of women, including through the Commonwealth Plan of Action update. My Government looks forward to hosting a Commonwealth South Pacific symposium on gender, politics and peace-building later this month. It will be another example of the Commonwealth's role in furthering, among other things, women's involvement in politics and conflict resolution.

At the beginning of the millennium, we need to take stock of our efforts to date, and find new and innovative ways of working together in partnerships to achieve the full equality of women and harness their contribution to peace and development for the twenty-first century.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on Her Excellency Mrs. Intisar Al-Wazir, Minister for Social Affairs of the Palestinian Authority.

Mrs. Al-Wazir (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset allow me, on behalf of my delegation, to express to the President of the General Assembly our appreciation for his able leadership of this twenty-third special session, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

This session is being viewed with the highest regard and accorded the highest importance by women throughout the world, particularly women in Palestine. We are here, five years after the Beijing Conference, to evaluate the achievements, assess the continuing obstacles and recommend procedures and initiatives to accelerate steps towards the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and to ensure that we fulfil our commitments to achieving a better society founded on equality, justice and peace.

This will require clear vision and a true understanding of reality. It will also require an increase in the resources necessary for empowering women and promoting their political, economic and social development and status, thus enabling them to play a more effective and equal role in all areas.

Palestinian women, like all the people of Palestine, have long been deprived of the opportunity to develop their social and economic potential because of the continued Israeli occupation and Israel's oppressive policies, including the confiscation of land, the building and expansion of settlements, the dispossession of the Palestinian people, the judaization of occupied East Jerusalem, the violation of the territorial integrity of the Palestinian land, the continued detention of prisoners and the refusal to allow refugees and displaced Palestinians to return. All these factors have exacerbated the inability of Palestinian women to thoroughly implement the Beijing Platform for Action.

Despite all of these obstacles and difficulties in promoting a viable and comprehensive plan for sustainable development, which result from the

continuation of the occupation, the Palestinian people, and in particular Palestinian women, have, in the past five years, been able to establish the foundations for the social, economic and institutional development of the Palestinian State, which will soon be declared.

Similarly, the Palestinian Authority has succeeded in establishing the foundation for the educational, health and economic infrastructures, as well as the various structures and networks for development, taking into consideration the gender issue. Moreover, legislation and regulations have been promulgated concerning the affairs of the Palestinian people. All such legislation has been based on international standards for the promotion of democracy in Palestinian life and for securing the principles of justice and equality among the Palestinian people, men and women alike. Also, under very difficult circumstances, the Palestinian people have held their first democratic and transparent elections, under international supervision, for a legislative council. Setting a precedent in the region, a woman candidate participated in the elections for the post of president, and five women were elected to the 88-member legislative council. In addition, Palestinian women are participating in all areas of society through their work in the various departments and ministries of the Palestinian Authority.

Despite the prominence of Palestinian women in their own society, which was recognized in the highest legal Palestinian document, the Declaration of the State, their prominent role has not been reflected by equal participation at the decision-making level due to customs, traditions and the prevalence of a traditional mentality that views women as secondary participants in development.

In order to overcome all of these obstacles, and to promote the development of women, women's units in all of the Ministries have been created. Additionally, a women's unit was created in the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics. Moreover, a coordinating committee was established to coordinate work among the various units in the ministries helping to promote the status of Palestinian women. Also, the General Union of Palestinian Women, in cooperation with various women's committees and women's organizations, has created an active network.

The collective output of non-governmental and governmental organizations has resulted in a national strategy for Palestinian women that serves as the basis for future plans with a view to achieving the following goals: first, to define priorities and unite efforts to minimize the gender gap for the promotion of sustainable development; secondly, to coordinate the various programmes in order to serve the needs and objectives of the Palestinian development plan and to give priority to women in rural areas, refugee camps and women in poverty; thirdly, to review various policies and legislation in order to ensure that there is no gender discrimination, to work on the promotion of gender-sensitive legislation and to ensure its implementation; and fourthly, to develop a database of information about women and to empower the various women's units in the various ministries of the Palestinian Authority, the General Union of Palestinian Women and other women's organizations.

In spite of the recurring stalemate in the peace process, we wish to reaffirm the commitment of our people and their leadership to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace that guarantees the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, especially the rights to return, to self-determination and to the establishment of their independent State on all of the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967, the heart of which is Jerusalem, the city of peace.

I would also like to convey our deepest appreciation for the moral and financial support and assistance that has been provided by the community of nations. From this platform, I appeal to the international community, and especially to the United Nations, to continue to shoulder their responsibilities in connection with the question of Palestine until it is effectively resolved in all its aspects, and to exert pressure on Israel to release all Palestinian political prisoners from Israeli jails and to implement all relevant United Nations resolutions, especially Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and General Assembly resolution 194 (III), regarding the right of return.

Allow me here to reaffirm our solidarity with all women who are experiencing additional hardships and difficulties — those who struggle against foreign occupation and injustice everywhere. I refer in particular to the Syrian women in their struggle to end the occupation of all of the Golan, the Lebanese women, whom we congratulate on the end of the occupation of beloved southern Lebanon, and the Arab women of the entire region, including the Iraqi women

in their suffering due to the long-standing sanctions imposed on their country.

Palestinian women look forward to realizing the complete sovereignty of the independent Palestinian State on all of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, so that Palestine will be able to accede to all international conventions and treaties, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, because we firmly believe that without the attainment of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace, it will not be possible for Palestinian women to achieve equality or to achieve full integration in all areas of Palestinian life, for the achievement of necessary sustainable development for the Palestinian people.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.

United Nations A/S-23/PV.8

General Assembly
Twenty-third special session

Official Records

8th meeting
Thursday, 8 June 2000, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 3 *(continued)*

Credentials of representatives to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly

(b) Report of the Credentials Committee (A/S-23/7)

The President: The Assembly will now take action on the draft resolution recommended by the Credentials Committee in paragraph 15 of its report (A/S-23/7). The Credentials Committee adopted the draft resolution without a vote.

May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do the same?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution S-23/1).

The President: We have thus concluded our consideration of agenda item 3.

Agenda items 8 and 9 *(continued)*

Review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the twelve critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action

Further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

The President: The Assembly will first hear a statement by Her Excellency Mrs. Tembé Ashira Assih-Aïssah, Minister for Social Affairs and Advancement of Women of Togo.

Mrs. Assih-Aïssah (Togo) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, allow me to convey the warm greetings of the President of the Togolese Republic, General Gnassingbé Eyadema, and of the Government and people of Togo.

On behalf of the delegation that is accompanying me and on my own behalf, I also wish to express our satisfaction with the outstanding manner in which you, Mr. President, our guiding our work.

This special session of the General Assembly assumes special importance for the Government of Togo because it constitutes an additional milestone in continuing action by the international community to improve the situation of women and girls at the opening of the third millennium. In accordance with the commitments endorsed at Beijing, as well as with those undertaken through relevant international instruments, relentless efforts are being carried out to ensure harmonious and integrated development for women and girls through the creation of a more adequate environment which is favourable to luck and opportunity.

Ensuring for women full citizenship and fundamental rights on an equal footing with men has become one of the major concerns of our development policy. The commitments made have been reflected not only in the establishment of a National Committee for

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the follow-up of the Beijing Platform for Action, but also in the drafting of a national plan for action spread out over five years, which has seven priority areas that include education, health, women's rights and employment.

However, it must be emphasized that the promotion of the status of women necessarily requires the cooperation of men, partnership between the State and civil society and cooperation between the bilateral and multilateral development partners, particularly the United Nations agencies.

From this perspective, we have given priority to interdisciplinarity and interaction within the National Committee by integrating representatives of State structures, non-governmental organizations, women's association and United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). This strategic choice has also strengthened solidarity and coordination and has allowed for a better vision of women's problems and related synergy of action.

Within that context, and parallel to the decentralization process under way in my country for many years, the National Committee to follow-up Beijing is linked on the prefectural and subprefectural levels to local committees made up of men and women of varying social and professional profiles. This national coverage has allowed for a real assumption of responsibility and effective community participation at the grass-roots level.

Allow me to report briefly on some of the progress accomplished in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action through our plan for action. This progress is undoubtedly insufficient, but it is tangible. I remain optimistic regarding its positive effects on the status of women and girls, in view of the political will of the Government of Togo to fight all inequality and injustice, and bearing in mind the firm and growing determination of women to free themselves from sexual discrimination and poverty.

Considering that illiteracy among women is one of the main obstacles to equality, development and peace, the Government of Togo has made the education of girls, functional literacy and professional training of women the spearhead of its plan for action. It is encouraging to stress that from the start the Government, in adopting specific measures, has determined clear and precise guidelines. Recourse to positive discrimination regarding education has thus become necessary in order to encourage the education of girls, particularly in rural areas. Another advantage of this measure is that it aims to fight early marriage.

Thus the Government of Togo has reduced the cost of girls' education at the primary level and at the same time has favoured granting educational scholarships to those who reach the university level. One can highlight here the complementary action of several development partners which, through special programmes, contribute to the improvement of the quality of scholastic infrastructure, teacher-training and the sponsorship of poor students in rural areas by granting them teaching materials, school supplies and uniforms.

Violence against women is a reality which no one can deny and must be fought at all costs, if we wish to establish a climate of peace and prosperity. This is why in our strategies we use innovative approaches to make the various social groups aware of the pressing urgency to end harmful practices against women's health, which constitute serious human rights violations.

In that regard, the Government of Togo took a courageous step in promulgating the law of 17 November 1998 banning female mutilation, of which roughly 12 per cent of Togolese girls and women are victims. Therefore, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Advancement of Women, together with the ministries of health, justice, the interior and security, in association with non-governmental organizations, has launched a broad information campaign to publicize this law.

Recently, we organized two days of study on violence against women for the traditional chiefs and regional directors and police headquarters.

At the same time, a vast awareness campaign is being carried out throughout the country to fight the traffic in and exploitation of children. Togo is pleased to have hosted, from 2 to 5 May 2000, the regional meeting of ministers from West and Central Africa on the rights of women and children, organized by UNICEF. This meeting, which launched the Global Movement for Children, put together a series of recommendations contained in the so-called Lomé platform.

Regarding strengthening women's economic power, the question of women's access to the means of production, such as credit, land, appropriate technology and in agriculture, is increasingly being addressed through the availability of microcredit to women. It is important to note that the Government of Togo has established a support programme for savings and loans and other cooperatives. In 1998, there were already 51 decentralized finance structures.

In the rural environment women's groups have a technical framework provided for through State structures and non-governmental organizations. Thus, here and there we are seeing mutual savings and loans cooperatives emerge that offer rural women opportunities to improve productivity and enhance their income.

With regard to women's dynamism, their sharp business sense and promptness in repaying their loans, the prospect of developing female entrepreneurship by creating small- and medium-sized businesses and a bank is attracting public attention. Studies are under way and will soon lead to concrete decisions.

At the political level women are aware that their effective participation in the management of public affairs is henceforth imperative, and thus so is the reinforcement of the fabric of women's associations through the establishment of networks.

The effective promotion of equality between men and women and the contribution to human development and lasting peace must take place through the implementation of sustained national policies favouring the access of young girls to education and training, strengthening the economic power of women, rigorous application of measures to eradicate violence imposed upon women and adoption of strategies involving the full participation of women in civic management.

However, it is important to recognize that as laudable as the efforts made by a number of countries may be, those efforts will certainly not achieve the goals set at Beijing without international solidarity. Let us all — Governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and civil society — make a commitment at the end of this special session to do everything possible so that the beginning of the third millennium will see women recognized at all levels. Let us ensure that, more than ever before, the status of women will improve and that, throughout the world, from the most remote hamlets to the largest metropolitan regions, women will no longer suffer from violence, the consequences of armed conflict, disease, illiteracy, ignorance and poverty.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency, Mrs. Tadelech Michael, Minister of Women's Affairs Sub-sector, Office of the Prime Minister of Ethiopia.

Mrs. Michael (Ethiopia): It is indeed a great honour for me, as head of the Ethiopian delegation, to address this body at the eagerly awaited Beijing + 5 special session, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

I would also like to extend my delegation's sincere appreciation for all the preparations for this conference, in the context of which Ethiopia also had the opportunity to host the sixth African Regional Conference on Beijing + 5, held in Addis Ababa, from 22 to 26 November 1999.

Let me also convey the warm greetings of the women of Ethiopia, who exercised their election rights, as a result of which the whole month of May was marked by democracy and victory, thereby allowing the Government and the people of Ethiopia to refocus on development activities.

My Government reaffirms its commitment to advance the status of women by implementing all human rights instruments and relevant treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which Ethiopia signed in 1981, as well as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Though Government institutions play a crucial role in the implementation of the national women's policy and the Beijing Platform for Action, it is recognized that non-governmental organizations and women's organizations also have a significant role in the successful implementation of the Platform. Strategies have also been developed for joint cooperation between the Government and non-governmental organizations through the Women's Affairs Office and non-governmental organizations. The strategies developed are focused on the areas of gender mainstreaming, advocacy, capacity-building, supporting grass-roots women's organizations and networking.

At the stage where we are now, mainstreaming gender in other sectoral development endeavours and promoting gender-specific activities are equally important, if it is really intended to bring change to the lives of the majority of women. Thus, attention and support must be given to gender-specific programmes as well.

In accordance with the commitment it entered into, the Government of Ethiopia has been making efforts for the realization of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which spelled out 12 critical areas of concern to be addressed by Member countries of the United Nations. Most of the issues raised and adopted as critical areas of concern have been considered and placed on the Ethiopian Government's agenda of top priorities, in keeping with our country's reconstruction and development programmes for matters such as poverty alleviation, food security, education, health and road sector development programmes.

With regard to poverty, in order to do away with the legacies of the past and improve the socio-economic situation of the people, my Government has issued sound policies and designed workable programmes. The first economic recovery programme, launched at the beginning of 1992 and, later, the five-year programme on development, peace and democracy have been implemented in the last five years.

Another form of a poverty-reduction adopted by the Government was the intensification of agricultural extension programmes by subsidizing appropriate agricultural inputs to small farmers. In addition, the disbursement of credits to the urban and rural poor was another step taken. Fifty per cent of the beneficiaries targeted were female heads of households and girls who had dropped out of school.

The Ethiopian Social Rehabilitation and Development Fund, which is funded mostly by bilateral and multilateral organizations, including the World Bank, mainly targets poor rural communities and has a special focus on women. The overall objectives of this programme are poverty alleviation through the provision of assets and services and capacity-building that includes managerial and technical skills. As a result of the actions taken from July 1996 to September 1999, a total of 9,915,643 people have benefited from the programme, out of which 4,922,087 were women.

Similarly, non-governmental organizations are playing a critical role in poverty-reduction development programmes, with the aim of improving the quality of life of rural people through income-generating activities, by promoting the contribution of women and by providing the necessary support to enhance their economic empowerment. Non-governmental organizations, organized under 10 microfinance institutions, are disbursing credit to the poor, with more focus being given to women. Out of the total number of beneficiaries of microfinance institutions, between 55 and 60 per cent are women.

With regard to education and training, the education and training policy and the designing of the education sector development programme are aimed primarily at distributing opportunities evenly, improving quality, increasing the enrolment rate and bridging the gap between male and female participation and male and female achievement in schools. So far, the results registered in the increase in female enrolment at all levels of education, in particular the rise in the gross enrolment ratio in primary schools from 20.4 per cent in 1994–1995 to 35.3 per cent in 1998–1999, have been very encouraging. Likewise, the total gross enrolment ratio has increased from 26.2 per cent to 45.8 per cent during the period under consideration. It was indicated that although the enrolment of girls increased at the primary, secondary and higher institution levels, the gender gap still exists and needs to be bridged further.

Similarly, the increase in the enrolment rate of girls in technical and vocational schools and in skills development centres, the increase in the literacy rate from 23 per cent in 1994 to 26.6 per cent in 1998, and the prevalence of high illiteracy among a large section of the population have been stressed. Moreover, there has been an increase in the number of schools, through the participation of the private sector and non-governmental organizations, and affirmative action for female candidates who wish to join teachers' training institutes has been implemented.

At the same time, factors constraining the increase in the participation rate of female students were pinpointed, and were found to include: the attitude of parents towards girls' education; inaccessibility of schools, particularly in rural areas; inadequate funds for expansion of opportunities; lack of adequate teaching materials; and low quality of

education due to inadequate qualifications of teaching staff.

The dangers posed to the socio-economic situation of the country by the status of health — particularly the inadequacy of services, mainly in rural areas; major health problems of females, both directly and indirectly related to obstetric issues; effects of harmful traditional practices; and vulnerability to the HIV/AIDS pandemic — were highlighted. A survey has been conducted on harmful traditional practices, and an intensive campaign has been waged towards their eradication, with particular reference to female genital mutilation. The health sector development programme mainly emphasizes developing an equitable, affordable and acceptable standard for the health service system, with priority given to women and children.

The achievements resulting from the implementation of the health sector policy and the health sector development programme should be underlined. These include an increase in facilities through the participation of the private sector and non-governmental organizations, and a broadening of the coverage of services. Consequently, mother and child health services and vaccinations have increased, while potential health service coverage rose from 45 per cent in 1994–1995 to 52 per cent in 1997–1998.

In view of the increased danger of HIV/AIDS, the Government, non-governmental organizations, religious organizations, women's groups and society at large are actively campaigning against the pandemic. The National Council on AIDS, under the chairmanship of the President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, is tasked primarily with providing the necessary support to women and children so that they can protect themselves, and with giving assistance to those already infected, orphaned or widowed.

With respect to legislation, Ethiopia, as one of the founding Members of the United Nations, has ratified numerous conventions and declarations adopted at various times. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In its unwavering commitment to the protection of women's rights, as fully reflected in its constitution, the Government of Ethiopia has been making efforts to amend and eliminate discriminatory laws and practices imposed on the female population. The main areas of focus during the process of the revision and eventual amendment of family law have been discriminatory provisions in relation to marriage and family relations, such as marriageable age, conditions for concluding a marriage, the relationship of spouses and their roles in home management, as well as provisions with regard to choosing the place of residence, ownership of property, upbringing of children, divorce, family arbitration and the like. The measures taken so far to revise laws and prepare the ground for their enactment have been a step forward in improving the status of women in Ethiopia, although much more remains to be done.

With regard to women in decision-making, the guarantee of women's rights through the promulgation of the electoral law and the provisions contained in the constitution has created positive ground for the empowerment of women. It has been noted that the participation of women in casting votes during the previous election was high but that their representation in the respective offices and parliamentary seats was insignificant. The results of the 1995 elections showed that women's participation as candidates for parliamentary seats was very low. Based on the need for more empowerment of women, the creation of awareness and education on issues such as human and legal rights and women's capacity-building has been given high priority. Simultaneously, there is a need to further educate the public on the rights of females and on the role played by women in nation-building, as equal partners with men.

Taking account of those conditions, efforts to build the capacity of women in general, and of potential candidates in the election which took place in May 2000 in particular, were conducted through awareness-creation programmes at all levels. The women's committee in the House of Peoples Representatives, the women's affairs office and women's associations made concerted efforts to build the capacity of women to be elected and to vote in the election held in May 2000. Concurrently, awareness-raising programmes on gender issues, in particular in relation to women's constitutional rights, have also been conducted in various forums and at different levels, with a view to making the public more aware. The results have been viewed as positive.

A great deal has been achieved thus far, but much more remains to be done. We strongly believe that

peace is a prerequisite for development and equality. At a time when Ethiopia was fully engaged in development endeavours to bring to life a national economy that has been exhibiting a continuously declining trend for decades, my country became a victim of naked aggression two years ago. For more than two years, for the sake of peace, Ethiopia has persistently worked hard and has pledged to all peace-loving countries and organs that it would reverse this aggression and refocus its efforts on development. And again, for more than two years, Ethiopia has lived with humiliation, permitting almost half a million of its citizens, three quarters of them women and children, to live in deplorable conditions, simply because it wanted to give peace a chance.

Ethiopia has always fully respected the Charter of the United Nations, from the day it was signed 54 years ago. There are international rules and laws, and they are there to be followed by citizens of the world, whether they live in poor countries or rich. It is that equity before the law which big and small nations alike guarantee to respect when they join the world body, the United Nations, as Members. The United Nations should be an organization of principle and a genuine union which looks after and guarantees full respect for its Charter.

Nonetheless, Ethiopia, though betrayed by the implementers of international law today, as it was before, has managed to defend its sovereign territory through the sacrifices of the Ethiopian people, who have always stood in unison when such challenges arise, by forcing the aggressor to go back where it belongs.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency the Honourable Thebe David Mogami, Minister for Labour and Home Affairs of Botswana.

Mr. Mogami (Botswana): Botswana would like to thank the United Nations system and all Member States for their commitment to the advancement of women. We applaud all those who have made concerted efforts to bring about the convening of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, on the theme of "Women 2000: gender equality development and peace for the twenty-first century".

During the last three days, Member States and United Nations agencies have engaged in reflections on the progress, constraints and challenges experienced in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. I would therefore like to add Botswana's contribution to what has been said.

The preparation for the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women provided an important opportunity to consolidate ongoing efforts to advance the cause of women in Botswana. The preparatory activities undertaken by the Botswana Government and women's non-governmental organizations led to a new collaboration between Government and civil society, which made it possible to identify six of the 12 critical areas of concern documented in the Beijing Platform for Action as priority issues. The six critical areas as adopted by Botswana women, in order of priority, are women and poverty, including women's economic empowerment; women in power and decision-making; education and training for women; women and health; violence against women and human rights; and the girl child, which cuts across the above five critical areas.

Women and poverty, including women's economic empowerment, is Botswana's first-priority national area of concern. Women in Botswana tend to suffer poverty and economic marginalization more acutely than men. A number of factors contribute to the differential in the experience of poverty and economic disadvantage between the two groups. These factors include legal and cultural norms that restrict women's access to, and control of, productive resources. Gender inequalities also exist in the education system, and this has a negative impact on poverty alleviation strategies. The Government has put in place poverty eradication policies and programmes in order to increase women's access to productive resources, such as credit, training and other resources. Non-governmental organizations also provide support to women's economic activities so as to improve their economic status.

On the issue of women in power and decision-making, Botswana recognizes that the participation of women in decision-making at all levels of public and private life is an important issue of human rights, as well as of the strengthening of the democratic process. In an effort to address the existing disparities, my Government has embarked on political education, social mobilization, lobbying and advocacy. Other partners, particularly the non-governmental organizations, network with political parties and their women's wings, so as to encourage political parties to endorse women's demands, which are included in their manifestos. As a result of these efforts, the representation of women in the Botswana Parliament

increased from 9 per cent in 1994 to a little over 18 per cent in 1999, while in the Cabinet it increased from 12.5 per cent in 1994 to a little over 23 per cent in 1999. The representation of women at the permanent secretary level in Government is presently 25 per cent.

The Botswana Public Service and the country's Central Bank are led by women. There are programmes in place to build women's leadership and management capacity, as well as affirmative action in the selection of specially nominated counsellors and members of Parliament. The major challenges in this area are the limited resources for campaigns and political education, prevailing gender stereotypes and the absence of a comprehensive affirmative action plan focusing on promoting gender equality at all levels.

Regarding the issue of education and training for women, Botswana is committed to the ideal of education as a basic human right. A free 10-year programme of basic education is in place. Our national policy on education has been revised, and vocational and technical education has been expanded to attract more women. The special education needs of young mothers are addressed by women's non-governmental organizations that provide young mothers an opportunity to complete their studies through secondary and tertiary levels. Major challenges in this area include limited day-care facilities, teenage pregnancy, low enrolment of females in science and technical education programmes and the unavailability of teachers who are sufficiently trained and sensitized to deliver the new curriculum.

In the area of women and health, it is important to note that one's health and well-being are an outcome of the economic, social, political and cultural context. In Botswana's case, for example, negative cultural norms and practices still restrict women's capacity to make informed choices regarding their sexual and reproductive health, as well as regarding available health-care services. Nevertheless, Botswana has made some strides in this area of women and health. Since 1995, Botswana has revised the family planning guidelines, with the aim of removing impediments to health services for women and girls. There is also an integration of sexually transmitted disease and HIV/AIDS prevention with family planning services and a reduction of mother-to-child transmission of HIV. There has been increased attention on adolescent sexual and reproductive health, as well as an improvement in health information, which has resulted in a reduction of teenage pregnancy.

Violence against women is one of the pervasive and escalating social problems in Botswana. In trying to overcome the problem, the Government recently carried out a study on the socio-economic implications of violence against women on the basis of which a multi-sectoral approach will be taken to confront and overcome this evil. Among the several measures undertaken by Botswana with regard to violence against women are the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1996; the amendment of the Penal Code Act, which has improved laws relating to rape; the establishment of a shelter for battered women; and the establishment of the Botswana police and non-governmental organization task force on domestic violence.

In 1997, the Botswana Government commissioned a review of all the laws that discriminate against women with a view to amending them. In order to enhance the implementation of the six critical areas, Botswana had to put in place institutional mechanisms, and these include the elevation of the National Gender Machinery to the status of a full-fledged Department, the promulgation of a National Policy on Women in Development, the formulation of the National Gender Programme Framework, the strengthening of the Women's Non-Governmental Organization Coalition and other civil society organizations dealing with gender issues and the formation of the National Council on Women and its subcommittees focusing on the six critical areas of concern.

The general perception of the advancement of women has changed significantly in the last five years. This is a result of gender-awareness-building efforts, which include international bodies.

In conclusion, Botswana remains committed to the Beijing Platform for Action. We will do everything possible to pursue the implementation of the Platform to its logical conclusion. We hope that this session, which is very important to all of us, will produce an outcome document that will further strengthen our resolve to implement the Platform for Action.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jerzy Kropiwnicki, Minister, Head of the Government Centre for Strategic Studies of Poland.

Mr. Kropiwnicki (Poland): Let me begin by congratulating you, Sir, on your election to the high office of President of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. I would also like to express my delegation's respect and appreciation to Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

In the opinion of the Government of the Republic of Poland, this session constitutes a significant step in promoting the development of nations and States, as foreseen by resolutions adopted in Beijing in 1995.

Having emerged from a long and difficult process, the agreement reached five years ago in the shape of the Platform for Action was a product not only of our common commitment and imagination, but also of our willingness to make necessary compromises. Today we are participating in the Beijing review conference, which has been convened to learn how successful we have been in our efforts to meet the standards agreed upon five years ago and to reconfirm our pledge to make further progress in carrying out decisions taken in Beijing. The eventual success of this endeavour of ours is contingent upon universal respect for every human being. This in turn entails, first and foremost, acknowledgement of the dignity and equal rights of men and women in all spheres of life. The Constitution of the Republic of Poland creates the framework in which these equal rights in social life are fully respected.

It is in the family that a human being finds his or her natural environment. It is into the family that successive generations are born and in the family where they grow in wisdom and learn how to reconcile individual rights with social obligations. The right of parents to raise their children in the family, as well as their right and primary obligation to educate them, should therefore be respected. Consequently, increased support should be offered to mothers and fathers who struggle to balance the demands of work and family responsibilities.

The Constitution of the Republic of Poland is rooted in the strong conviction that the law must protect human life from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death. Hence, Polish law ensures medical, social and legal care for pregnant women. In its concern for the appropriate development of the family, the Government of the Republic of Poland has created the National Pro-family Policy Programme, which strives to strengthen the foundations of family life and provide health care at every stage of life, as well as education for young people that emphasizes respect for natural and social human rights. Family assistance centres — part of the national social services — have been established at the local level. Taking on violence against women, which, though marginal, has an enormously destructive moral impact, figures among the tasks of these centres.

The National Health Programme that has been implemented in Poland is aimed at holistic health promotion, including the prevention of diseases and disability, as well as effective treatment for life-threatening diseases, particularly cancer and those diseases that affect the cardiovascular system. Moreover, health programmes have been introduced to improve the effectiveness of women's sexual and reproductive health care. Positive effects of these actions have already been observed. For instance, there has been a decrease in mortality caused by cardiovascular diseases, a drop in the number of infants born with low birth weight and a reduction in the number of HIV/AIDS infections.

The right to education is regarded as one of the fundamental human rights. The laws concerning the Polish education system ensure equal access to schools for all citizens. Gender equality is strictly observed at all educational levels. In fact, at the moment, more women than men are being educated at university level. The reform of the education system, as currently implemented in Poland, has resulted in important changes being introduced into curricula. In the reformed system, schools will provide students with the opportunity for the comprehensive development of their personalities, including the development of their physical, emotional, intellectual, moral and spiritual potential.

The Polish labour code is founded on the principle of equal rights for men and women in the field of professional activity. Similarly, the civil code guarantees equal rights for both genders in its area of application. Positive changes are being manifested in the increasing number of women who occupy managerial positions in economic and public life. However, there are some indications that equality between women and men in the labour market has not yet been achieved. This relates both to opportunities for finding a job and to the level of earnings. Efforts are being undertaken to reduce unemployment and to

improve attitudes vis-à-vis women in the labour market.

With regard to the legislative sphere, the right of women and men to equal working conditions and to equal remuneration is being gradually adjusted to the standards of the European Union.

The principle of solidarity has borne much fruit in Poland. The citizens have regained their freedom, and the country has won back its sovereignty and independence. Democratic institutions and mechanisms are constantly being developed. These profound changes, coupled with the rising standard of citizens' education, are contributing decisively to the development of political activity and other forms of social life. Against this background, one can expect the vital role of women in society to continue to grow.

I am pleased to inform this body that Poland has ratified all fundamental international legal instruments pertaining to human rights and fundamental freedoms, many of which refer specifically to the rights of women. In undertaking all the efforts that I have just outlined, Poland continues to believe that a pure and unbiased concept of the dignity of the human person constitutes the very foundation of culture, serves as the main source of the well-being of individuals and societies and is a prerequisite for the development of nations.

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. María Fernanda Flores de Alemán, Coordinator of the Social Cabinet of Nicaragua.

Mrs. Flores de Aleman (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a great honour for me to be able to stand in this Hall, which represents the commitment of the nations of the world, united in the most noble cause of humankind.

From the Headquarters of this union, which began more than half a century ago, we declared collectively, for the first time, the recognition of the fundamental rights and dignity of the human being and the value of the person, as well as the equality of those rights for men and women and for nations large and small.

Within this magnificent tradition, we are meeting once again in this important forum with the purpose of continuing to work to make that equality a reality for half of humankind: women.

Since the Fourth World Conference on Women, Nicaragua has joined other nations in undertaking a new course, making greater efforts to advance the cause of women. It is in this spirit that, today, we are meeting the challenge of gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century by undertaking this five-year review of the Platform for Action.

Gender equality is the logical consequence of the recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family, in the fine words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and constitutes the true basis of freedom, justice and peace. Equal dignity and rights must result in equal opportunity for all and clearly constitute a parameter of human freedom, without which there can be no rule of law or true democracy, which requires the participation of all.

We understand and desire the full participation of women as the freedom that every woman should enjoy in order to play a role in all professions, activities and spheres, without prejudice, to achieve personal progress, and to contribute to social, economic and political development.

Aware of all this, and recognizing that the Platform for Action is considered to be an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women, the State of Nicaragua, given its limited resources, has prioritized six of its twelve areas of critical concern. Our priorities are poverty, education, health, violence, institutional mechanisms and the girl child.

We are working hard against the feminization of poverty. We have developed mechanisms, plans and programmes to ensure the effective access of women, on an equal footing, to consumer goods. Nicaragua recognizes the right of women to own property and, under its Constitution, protects their right to receive equal pay for equal work.

By strengthening the institutions that govern and promote small and medium-sized enterprises, we have supported women throughout the country in obtaining credit and the training they need for empowerment. In this effort, priority has been given to rural women.

We have made a special commitment to education because we recognize that all deep changes in a country's social structure begin with education. Education is the sine qua non of sustainable development. Through its educational policy,

Nicaragua ensures access to education and training within its means to ensure the full participation of women in the process of social, economic and political development. Women have been given priority in the process of eliminating illiteracy, while the gender perspective is the main axis of the academic curriculum in public education.

The issue of health, which affects women in particular, is addressed systematically through what is known in Nicaragua as the Fourth Health Policy. The Policy caters to the different needs of the sexes at every stage of life. One result of comprehensive health care for women is that primary out-patient care now reaches 82 per cent of the female population.

The promotion of breastfeeding and the prolonged efforts of government policy contributed to the recent approval of a law on breastfeeding, which protects mother and child during the lactation period, guaranteeing the conditions and time necessary, even during working hours. Moreover, infants and lactating mothers are protected by a policy on nutrition.

We have a network of basic centres run by women, where care for sexual and reproductive health is available and information on and access to family planning are offered. There is also a hospital for elderly women.

With regard to violence, Nicaragua has advocated the formulation of a policy aimed at the gradual eradication of domestic violence, with special priority for women, adolescent and child victims of this painful problem. We are drafting a national plan against violence that will guide intersectoral action, with the participation of civil society and the State.

The Government of Nicaragua, represented by the Minister of the Family as a governing body through the Nicaraguan Institute for Women, is working for the advancement of women and has developed measures aimed, *inter alia*, at mobilizing and training women leaders in the various political parties; training personnel to run workshops on leadership and personal efficiency in the area of violence; implementing legislation on children and adolescents; finding alternative sources of credit; and promoting the gender perspective.

Children, our promise for the future, are today the most vulnerable members of the population. Nicaragua protects the life of girls and boys from the moment of conception, without any discrimination whatsoever and with a view to a more just world of equal opportunity from the earliest age.

Nicaragua has taken decisive steps to define and protect the rights of girls and boys. It has signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is written into our Constitution. In 1998, we adopted the Law on Children and Adolescents; since then, we have developed many policies, actions and mechanisms to follow up this important legal instrument.

The attitudes promoting equality, development and peace begin with the values that are learned in the family. The Vienna World Conference on Human Rights effectively emphasized this fact, referring to the rights of children and stating that the full and harmonious development of children's personalities requires them to be reared in a family context, which therefore deserves greater protection.

We cannot disassociate women from the family. Nicaragua has a Ministry of the Family to coordinate action to protect and strengthen that fundamental nucleus of society. Thus, we have tried to implement the guidelines of the 1995 Platform for Action on recognizing the contribution of women to family well-being, the social significance of motherhood and the role played by parents in raising their children. The Nicaraguan State wishes to strengthen family ties for the good of all society.

We are pursuing all these efforts optimistically and enthusiastically. The Government of President Arnoldo Alemán intends to keep on working for women with a comprehensive approach to their welfare that covers all aspects of their being and all their public and private relationships.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Jytte Andersen, Minister for Gender Equality of Denmark.

Ms. Andersen (Denmark): Let me first of all express my Government's full association with the statement made by Portugal on behalf of the European Union.

We can be proud of the results of the United Nations world conferences on women. Mexico, Copenhagen, Nairobi and Beijing have made a difference. The Beijing Platform for Action is a strong forward-looking document, but we must keep moving

forward. No setbacks can be allowed. Only then shall we provide hope for women — hope for those women who experience a lack of respect for their human rights, violence outside or inside their homes; a lack of influence over their lives and bodies; a lack of decision-making power; a lack of access to education; and a lack of coherence between working life and family life.

Gender equality is still not a reality. Progress is too slow. We must focus on action. The political will to push the process forward is not strong enough. We must try harder. We must fight poverty and we must focus on women, including the disabled. Poverty will remain if women are kept from credit, land, property, education or decision-making processes.

Women's contributions and opportunities must be fully realized. At Beijing we committed ourselves to mainstreaming gender perspective into all policies and activities. Mainstreaming is not about integrating women into existing structures. It is about changing those structures. Such changes are necessary if both women and men are to participate on an equal footing in the development of their society.

For too long men have been side-tracked in the process. Partnership or a new social contract between women and men is necessary. Such a contract should clarify women's contribution to the economy, as well as men's contribution to family life. Professional and family responsibilities must go hand in hand.

Let me highlight an area where progress is most important. Trafficking in women is one of the most degrading violations of women's human rights. A root cause of trafficking is almost always poverty. Women are looking for better lives, not least for their families. At a recent trial in a Danish court a witness, a young Latin American woman was asked why she had ended up as a prostitute in Denmark. She answered, "You have no idea of the level of poverty my family and I were facing."

Long-term development is needed to fight such trafficking. But other tools must also be utilized. International cooperation is vital to identify those behind the crimes. Traffickers must be punished and victims must be protected. Negotiations on a United Nations protocol on trafficking are taking place in Vienna. Let us make them a success.

Human rights instruments are imperative in the fight for women's human rights. All human rights must be respected, and human rights include reproductive and sexual rights.

I am pleased to announce that Denmark was the third United Nations Member to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It is my hope that other countries will soon follow. Women need the Protocol. The Protocol is a political signal that women's rights are human rights and that human rights are women's rights. Only by keeping women's issues on the agenda will we be able to make progress. Gender equality has not yet been fully achieved.

Tomorrow we shall recommit ourselves to the Platform for Action. We have come to New York to agree on further actions to strengthen and speed up the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Let us demonstrate our political will in action. Let us take important decisions tomorrow. Let us dedicate ourselves to the implementation of these decisions. Let us meet again in five years at the fifth United Nations World Conference on Women. Women around the world are waiting for us. We cannot let them down.

The President: I call on Ms. Zohra Guliyeva, Minister of the State Committee for Women's Issues of Azerbaijan.

Ms. Guliyeva (Azerbaijan) (*spoke in Russian*): Allow me, on behalf of the Government and the delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan, to welcome all participants in this session and to wish us all a productive endeavour. I am confident that the decisions adopted at this session will be crucial for all women of the world at the turn of the century and of the millennium.

The Fourth World Conference on Women, held at Beijing in 1995, continuing the Nairobi strategies, defined the problems and challenges facing women at the national, regional and global levels. The National Plan of Action of Azerbaijan was elaborated and adopted on the basis of the Beijing Platform for Action and is being implemented successfully in our country.

Today the region of the Caucasus is the focus of attention of the entire world, unfortunately, primarily as a flashpoint of conflicts and disputes. For those of us who faced the consequences of the armed conflict in

and around the Nagorny Karabakh region of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the magic word "peace" in the triad "equality, development and peace" determines everything else.

From this high rostrum, I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Development Fund for Women for their assistance in organizing the Baku Regional Conference entitled "Women and armed conflict". In the first such visit since the outbreak of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, women's delegations from Armenia arrived in Baku to participate in the Conference. The women participants unanimously accepted the Baku Declaration, reflecting their belief that despite all the loss, pain and suffering that affected thousands of families, and the great number of refugees, we women should make compromises for the sake of our common future and for the achievement of a stable and just peace in the region.

This peace-building activity was followed by meetings of women's non-governmental organizations under the auspices of the American Academy for Education Development and Harvard University, in the framework of the "Women waging peace" initiative, the global network of women peacemakers.

At present, Azerbaijan is living in a state of neither peace nor war. After peace was achieved in the region, the women of Azerbaijan believed that one of the most important directions for developing the country and the region as a whole was the implementation of various programmes for regional cooperation. Among those programmes, the Europe-Caucasus-Asia transportation corridor project is of special importance. It is virtually the plan for restoration of the Great Silk Road. For us, the Silk Road is a significant part of our past, which is characterized by a high level of ethnic and religious tolerance and cultural and economic cooperation. At the same time, the Silk Road is a substantial part of our future, a path towards further development using the unique geopolitical opportunities of the Caucasus to create an economic, transportation and communication bridge between Asia and Europe.

However, all these plans have not yet been sufficiently reflected in the real lives of women of Azerbaijan. We are facing numerous problems common to all countries with economies in transition. The heavy burden of economic problems lies primarily on the shoulders of women. The situation is aggravated by the fact that there are almost 1 million refugees and displaced persons in our country, the majority of whom are women and children deprived of shelter, work and a means of subsistence.

The measures to alleviate this situation could include a microcredit programme, the establishment of women's banks, and special plans for women's economic empowerment with the cooperation of the relevant international agencies.

While underscoring the significance of the programmes for economic development, we also highly appreciate the fact that women are the majority in the workforce of the country's education system, in the public health sector and in culture. Women make up 9.2 per cent of the management of the municipal executive authorities. Women hold 6.2 per cent of positions in Government and constitute 30 per cent of the public administration. I would particularly like to point out that today the chairpersons of the country's Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals are women. We women occupy ministerial and sub-ministerial positions. We are at the head of departments in the Cabinet of Ministers and the Office of the President. As a result of the increased activity by women, the parliamentary elections held in Azerbaijan after the Beijing Conference secured 12 per cent of the membership of the supreme legislative body for women.

The national report that Azerbaijan submitted to the session of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in January 1998 was a distinctive illustration of the country's implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. As the report pointed out, Azerbaijan promotes an equal rights policy for women at all levels. It is also worth noting that, constitutionally and legislatively, women in Azerbaijan are totally equal to men in rights. Moreover, draft legislation is being studied with gender expertise. At the same time, it is obvious that the transition from the policy of equal rights to the policy of equal opportunities indubitably requires additional efforts.

In that connection I would like to mention that the State policy on the advancement of women in society has been worked out and is being implemented throughout the country. This policy is yielding results. Among its accomplishments we can mention the institutionalizing of agencies that are directly

responsible for the advancement of women. The State Committee for Women's Issues was established. Meanwhile, a widespread network of women's non-governmental organizations is operating throughout the country. Generally, all this creates opportunities for the successful implementation of the Beijing Platform at the national level. The Fifth Congress of the Women of Azerbaijan, held in 1998, demonstrated the increased interest and potential of women to participate more actively in all spheres of life.

The great twelfth century poet, Mehseti Ganjevi, wrote sadly that it is a rare thing for women's dreams to come true. However, it is my strong belief that our dreams of real equality, development and just peace will eventually come true.

The President: I now give the floor to Mrs. Gladys Gutiérrez, Minister for Women's Affairs of the Dominican Republic.

Mrs. Gutiérrez (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me first of all, Mr. President, to convey to you very warm greetings on behalf of the delegation of the Dominican Republic present here, which is comprised of both governmental and non-governmental members.

It is a fact that the Beijing Platform for Action has opened doors towards establishing modes of communication between societies and States that have begun to yield auspicious results. In that context, we are making strides in the long race to overcome the obstacles that prevent the development of women and their equal presence in the public life.

Changes have taken place in Latin America and the Caribbean, such as the adoption in most States of laws against domestic violence and the significant work carried out by the Special Rapporteur on this matter, the participation of women in elections for offices at the congressional, municipal and public administration levels, and the important changes in the civil and employment sectors.

In the international arena, it is also important to highlight the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its signing by many States, and the adoption, signing and ratification by a significant number of States of the International Criminal Court Statute that has a clear perspective on gender.

Remarkable achievements have been made with respect to the human rights of women, especially in the way they have been reconceptualized, in the acknowledgement that women's rights are human rights, and in terms of the recognition of sexual and reproductive rights as an integral part of human rights. In the Dominican Republic, the Beijing Platform for Action has been a key framework for improving women's lives and for broadening their prospects for growth.

Over these five years, we have pooled our wills and have achieved important changes, such as consolidating progress through the adoption, promulgation and application of laws and the establishment in 1999 of the office of Secretary of State for Women's Affairs, which is a high-level department responsible for State policy on women and for coordinating the implementation of policies for gender equality in all sectors. Those achievements are the result of joint work by the three branches of the State, women members of political parties, and non-governmental organizations. The growing participation of non-governmental organizations in many areas of Dominican public life has had a positive effect on basic issues, such as health and education, which have been the focus of special attention, especially in recent years.

Another fundamental advance has been the formulation of a national plan for gender equality, which includes the establishment of indicators and the identification of concrete results that will serve as a basis for the implementation and follow-up of the plan. Among our other important achievements are the decrease in maternal mortality, greater accessibility of services for mothers and children, the implementation of reforms, and the development of a new model for health care. In the Dominican Republic, we have also increased awareness about violence against women and about domestic violence in general, and have created specific mechanisms for combating such violence.

In the economic field, Dominican women have made tangible progress with our significant presence in areas such as food production, animal husbandry, the financial sector and micro-enterprises, and by working in the duty-free and industrial zones. Nevertheless, we still have varied challenges confronting us. A review of the accomplishments and the obstacles of the past five years shows that the accomplishments have often been legislative while most of the obstacles have involved

problems of implementation. Such difficulties constitute a major challenge in terms of optimizing coordination and follow-up of the application of laws and standards, especially regarding labour law and the services provided for women in various areas.

Most women continue to work at lower-paid jobs, in spite of the fact that women are a dominant presence at all levels of education. Moreover, most political parties are reluctant to adopt gender equality. Still, women's issues dominate debate by political organizations, a trend that has continued through three election cycles. In the last presidential election, a woman, Mrs. Milagros Ortiz Bosch, was recently elected Vice-President of the Dominican Republic, which is an encouraging sign that the political field is opening up to participation by Dominican women. We are pleased that legislation exists allocating 33 per cent of congressional and municipal positions to women. This victory was achieved thanks to the determination of women members of political parties and of non-governmental organizations.

Despite such victories, major problems still have to be addressed as a priority matter through ongoing training and consciousness-raising programmes for officials in all State departments, and through responsible State management of the implementation of all these processes. If we are to overcome our difficulties, we shall need continued, firm political will and a high level of commitment to change on the part of the relevant authorities. That is a key factor for sustained focus on implementation and coordination of policies to promote the advancement of women.

An imperative objective of the Dominican Republic must be to continue to strive for goals based on the Beijing Platform for Action. Thanks to the broad gender vision of our current Government, our country has become increasingly integrated into this globalized world and is taking positive measures for human development and for gender equality.

At the international level, it is important to make progress towards the universal ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, towards the lifting of reservations concerning the Convention, towards the ratification of the Optional Protocol, towards the ratification of the Statute of the International Criminal Court and towards the strengthening and empowerment of national and international forums for women, notably the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW).

It is also important to maintain the link between the Platform for Action and the plans of action of other world conferences which made major contributions to the advancement of women, such as the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development, the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights and the Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development, to name but a few.

Moreover, political will must be pooled to address the issue of world poverty. Poverty must be eliminated if women are equally to enjoy the benefits of development.

The difficulties and obstacles which we have had to face in this five-year appraisal of Beijing constitute an important barometer for defining forward-looking strategies for women in the new millennium. Women of the entire world, here present, we must not retreat, we must not turn back, now that we have made such great progress towards the objectives of Beijing.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Janet Bostwick, Member of Parliament, Attorney General and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Bahamas.

Ms. Bostwick (Bahamas): My country, and particularly its women, enthusiastically welcomes the opportunity presented by this twenty-third special session of the General Assembly to join the global community in a comprehensive review of the action we have taken for gender equality pursuant to the commitments we made at Beijing. Equally as important is the opportunity the session affords us to take the action that would enable us to build on our accomplishments, to chart a course that would ensure gender equality, development and peace in this twenty-first century. May I say, therefore, how honoured I am to participate in this critical post-Beijing review. Why critical? It is critical because for many, if not for most of us, men and women — but especially women — the road that has challenged us to convene this session was traversed over one or more obstacles of discrimination, prejudice, violence, abuse, exploitation, repression and poverty. Therefore, we all must be recognized as survivors of these obstacles to gender equality and as soldiers who still have a war to win, even though some major battles have been won. We continue to hold fast

and to respond to the call to arms that commands us to take decisive action to address the manifold problems set out in the 12 critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Yes, there has been obvious progress in the advancement of women through actions taken by Governments, United Nations system agencies and civil society. The United Nations Secretariat has documented such advances.

Fortunately, the Bahamas is among those countries that have demonstrated improvements in the status of women. This was affirmed in the 1999 United Nations *Human Development Report*. The report's gender empowerment measure, which surveyed the relative empowerment of women and men in economic and political spheres, ranked the Bahamas number 13 out of 174 countries. It ranked the Bahamas as number one in Latin America and the Caribbean, and as the leading country in the developing world for this indicator, surpassing even many developed countries. To bring even greater perspective to this achievement, in 1996, the gender empowerment measure ranked the Bahamas twenty-sixth but, in 1999, thirteenth.

The Bahamas is particularly proud of the enabling environment it has provided for its female citizens of all ages, at all levels of development and at all levels of society. The Bahamas has placed special emphasis on health, poverty eradication, education and training, violence against women and the greater enjoyment of civil and political rights. Of special note are increased polyclinics with free pre-natal, neo-natal and post-natal care; total Government funding of AZT treatment for HIV-infected pregnant women, which has reduced transmission rates from mothers to infants from 30 per cent to 10 per cent and significantly reduced infant mortality rates from HIV/AIDS infection; the provision of on-site day-care facilities, inclusive of trained nurses, for the Government's upgraded Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute, which now offers over 20 disciplines, all open to women; the establishment of a state-of-the-art 24-hour Early Child Care Centre and the expansion of kindergarten facilities to almost all primary schools; the extension of free lunch programmes to all Government schools; partnership arrangements with non-governmental organizations dedicated to the well-being of female victims of violence, as well as the construction of safe houses in confidential locations for battered women and their children; media campaigns and public relations activities to prevent violence against women; and a full-time domestic Court for child maintenance, in addition to another Court dedicated to the trial of cases of domestic violence and cases involving juvenile offenders. Also worthy of note, the Government of the Bahamas has established a constitutional commission, as a result of which expected changes to the Constitution will, *inter alia*, abolish discriminatory qualifications for the granting of citizenship to the spouses of Bahamian women and will also provide for the conferral of citizenship on the children of Bahamian women, irrespective of their place of birth. Already, legislative reform has resulted in the granting of permanent resident status to the spouses of Bahamian nationals on an equal footing.

There is also the imminent introduction of the Inheritance Legislation, which will remove the primogeniture rule and allow women to inherit equally with men. Further, the Employment Act of 2000, introduced during this legislative period, addresses, among other measures, equal pay for equal work, parental leave, minimum wages and minimum standards of work. The Act also increases maternity leave from 8 to 12 weeks. These initiatives will result in the removal from Bahamian law of all vestiges of gender discrimination.

The Government of the Bahamas has also announced its planned introduction of flexible working hours in the public sector so as to permit parents, especially women who are heads of household, to spend quality time with their families and to reduce the need for children to be left unsupervised after school, thereby running the risk of falling prey to social ills.

I reiterate that there have been achievements in many countries. Nevertheless, I submit that we must take an even closer look at these achievements. Who have, indeed, been the primary beneficiaries? Are these achievements broadly distributed throughout our Organization's membership, or are they generally confined to the countries which already had been making strides towards the advancement of women prior to Beijing? Those of us who are faring slightly better than others should not lose sight of the grim circumstances that millions of women continue to face worldwide. It is a sad and sobering reality that, because of measures imposed or conditions existing in certain countries, women continue to be deprived of basic and fundamental human rights, such as the right to education or the right to gainful employment.

Systematic rape, torture and abuse continue to be weapons of choice in armed conflict. The nefarious traffic in women and children continues to grow at an alarming pace, thus subjecting them to horrendous forms of sexual and economic exploitation. We cannot stand by in silence while women continue to be violated in this manner. At every opportunity we must denounce these ills and demand that there be universal respect for the rights of women.

Therefore, we must be very clear in the message that we are now sending to these women and children who continue to be victims of sexually motivated and/or gender-based violence, slavery, exploitation, abuse, harassment and discrimination. What are we saying to them, when our negotiations to forge consensus in this special session lead us backwards, even if to previously agreed texts? The current challenges are far more stark and acute, as the local and international news media document daily. Whether, five years after Beijing, our perspective is coloured by lenses which see predominantly more progress for, or more prejudice against, the advancement and improved quality of life of women, the concerns which have arisen since Beijing point to the fact that there are now new commitments which we must address, over and above our continuing obligation under the Beijing Platform for Action.

I wish, finally, to turn to another aspect of our challenge for gender equality, which goes to the heart of the objective to which we all aspire. I am referring to the misconception that, by definition, the advancement of women means the marginalization of men. We are not in a zero-sum game of either/or, in which women can advance only at the expense of men, and vice versa. There can be genuine and progressive development only with honest partnership between the two genders. Both religion and science imply this.

The message of this special session must be that equality with men applies not to a particular category of women, but to all women. In all our efforts, we must send a clear message, to supporters and opponents alike, that gender equality is a win-win situation which elevates both genders and our societies and countries.

The equality of men and women is not an ideal, it is a realistic goal. Therefore, we should all leave this special session with an unswerving resolve to set and implement effectively a collective agenda that, with genuine commitment, will keep us on the Beijing path. The Government of the Bahamas remains committed to this goal.

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Cristina Muñoz, Minister for Women's Affairs of Paraguay.

Mrs. Muñoz (Paraguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for me to preside over the delegation of the Republic of Paraguay — a pluralistic and integrated delegation, including representatives of the Government and of non-governmental organizations — at this special session for the five-year follow-up and review of the Beijing Conference. I had the same privileged opportunity to head my delegation at that important Conference.

It would be useful to take this opportunity to reaffirm on behalf of the Government of National Unity, presided over by Mr. Luis Angel Gonzalez Macchi, and of the women of Paraguay, our commitment to democracy. Paraguay is fighting tenaciously to preserve, consolidate and strengthen its institutional democracy, with the effective participation of women — the guarantors of the process, which in turn, is enriching the democratic development of the international community.

With regard to gender equality, the efforts that we are making to abide by our commitments made in Beijing in implementing the Platform for Action have resulted in the National Plan for equality of opportunity for women, which is a key tool for incorporating gender perspectives in public policies.

We are also committed to reforming the State, with the objective of seeking greater efficiency in public administration.

While opening up marketing opportunities for many countries, the globalization of the economy has had different and negative effects on women. The reform and modernization of the State have become necessary for many of our countries, and it is therefore important to design effective policies to curb the increase in social and gender inequality. These are some of the issues that, in the light of the review of the Platform for Action, have of necessity emerged in our discussions, since poverty continues to be an unresolved issue on our common agenda.

After the Fourth World Conference, the women of Paraguay defined national priorities with a view to the implementation of the Platform for Action, sharing

responsibilities between the State and civil society. The result of this initiative was the establishment of the Tripartite Commission, made up of the presidency's Ministry for Women's Affairs, the Paraguayan women's network — a group of women's non-governmental organizations — and the United Nations Development Programme. Its goal is to fulfil the commitments that Paraguay entered into at Beijing and to follow up on achievements and obstacles.

Since the regional preparatory meeting, our delegation has been working to support the Lima Consensus in the firm belief that this special session of the General Assembly will ratify all of the commitments undertaken in Beijing and contribute new initiatives that will enable us to continue building a more equitable society.

Paraguay recognizes as fundamental the right to life, as well as the protection of the human rights of women, including sexual and reproductive rights.

We have made progress in legal reforms and in ensuring greater equality of opportunity in education. We are implementing the National Plan for equality of opportunity, which covers most of the areas for action in the Platform for Action. In December 1999, Paraguay signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which is currently awaiting ratification by our National Congress.

The Ministry for Women's Affairs, the governing body for gender equality, participates as an active member in the Council of Ministers, as well as in the Economic and Financial Policy Council and the Council responsible for social policy and for combating poverty. It thus operates at the highest level of government and brings a gender perspective to these decision-making bodies.

The Government has established a Council with responsibility for social policy and combating poverty, in which the social cabinet, trade unions, rural organizations and non-governmental organizations participate. Here, policies and activities aimed at creating a new model for development are developed in order to reduce existing social gaps, the rural sector being accorded priority.

An important step was the re-establishment of the National Council for reproductive health, which coordinates the Ministry of Public Health, where policies in this regard are orchestrated and focused. Furthermore, a National Commission to monitor health and maternal mortality has been created, while special out-patient programmes have been set up to arrange for mobile buses to reach suburban areas and rural settlements with the objective of continuing to reduce maternal and infant mortality, since maternal mortality is often linked to childbirth.

In the absence of the President, Mr. Ingólfsson (Iceland), Vice-President, took the Chair.

It is important to note that the Constitution of Paraguay clearly establishes, in article 61, that the State recognizes the right of people to decide, freely and responsibly, how many children to have and when to have them, as well their right to receive, in coordination with the relevant bodies, education, scientific guidance and the relevant services in this area, and that special programmes for reproductive and maternal and infant health will be prepared for needy people.

In the context of the National Plan for the Prevention and Punishment of Violence against Women, important measures have been taken to eradicate this scourge, which is a violation of the human rights of women. Among the legal reforms, we would point to the ratification of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence Against Women, signed in Belén do Para, Brazil, and the approval of new penal, trial and labour codes. We recently adopted a law on domestic violence, which establishes new centres for victims of violence through public institutions and non-governmental organizations.

We are implementing educational reform with a strategic plan known as "Paraguay 2020: Meeting the Educational Challenge"; a National Programme for Bilingual Education; and the General Law on Education, which seeks to establish the effective equality of the sexes and the elimination of all types of discrimination. PRIOME, an equal opportunity programme for women in education, is a joint action of the Women's Bureau and the Ministry of Education and is aimed at eliminating sexual stereotypes in the educational process by reviewing curriculums, training teachers and revising texts and supporting materials, incorporating the gender perspective throughout. The earliest results reflect an improvement in the rate of

girls graduating in basic, secondary and higher education and in school-attendance indicators.

The participation of Paraguayan women in popular elections has been improved by the application of a system of quotas in the lists of political parties, but these remain insufficient. We are completing ambitious research into women's leadership in Paraguay that reflects its quantitative and qualitative aspects. The Women's Bureau maintains an ongoing and dynamic relationship with international bodies and institutions, coordinating with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs a permanent presence in international forums. It also participates in executive commissions of important regional and international organizations and receives cooperation in the development of its programmes, undertaken in transparency and efficiency.

The implementation of the Platform for Action has been the supporting pillar of many of our actions. Its launch was an important learning process for all sectors involved, those of the State and of civil society alike, and its results have benefited all Paraguayan women.

In conclusion, we wish to point out that the qualitative development of our societies requires a greater investment of national and international resources. What better investment can the international community make than in the women of the world?

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Matthew Walter, Minister for Community Development and Women's Affairs of Dominica.

Mr. Walter (Dominica): I bring greetings from the Government and people of the Commonwealth of Dominica.

I consider it an honour and privilege to be permitted to address this special session of the General Assembly, convened specifically to re-examine the status of women as it relates to gender equality, development and peace in the twenty-first century. As Minister responsible for community development and gender affairs in the Commonwealth of Dominica, I take particular pleasure in being able to participate in the work of this great assembly of persons dedicated to the goal of achieving equity, justice and respect for women all over the world.

Our meeting here to assess the progress made towards the implementation of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is, in reality, recognition that the effects of decades of discrimination against and victimization of women could not be rectified in five years. Given the very intractable nature of the problems faced by women in society and the myriad exacerbating factors, there needs to be periodic review and constant focus on the commitment made in Beijing. This meeting also provides an opportunity to discuss and devise new strategies to deal with the impact of the new challenges and obstacles projected by globalization, trade liberalization, onerous debt burdens and the continuous decline in official development assistance.

Women and poverty is one of the critical issues addressed by the Beijing Platform for Action. In the Commonwealth of Dominica, as elsewhere, past practices raised barriers to women's equal participation in the country's economic benefits. The net result has been to relegate women to the lowest rung of the economic ladder. In an ameliorative effort, the Government of Dominica, through its Women's Bureau and other agencies, has embarked on a programme aimed at improving women's access to economic resources. For example, the Dominica Rural Enterprise Project, funded by loans from the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the Caribbean Development Bank, directs loan funds to women farmers and poor households headed by women in rural areas. Further, increasing amounts of loan funds are being made to women by such agencies as the Special Project Assistance Team, the National Development Foundation of Dominica and the Agriculture, Industry and Development Bank with funds obtained from the European Union. The Women's Bureau has also been addressing the problem of poverty through training for income generation, setting up skills-training programmes in targeted areas.

In the more formal educational setting, boys and girls continue to have equal access to primary and secondary education. The latest statistics indicate that the number of girls attending institutions of secondary education exceeds the number of boys and the same holds true at the tertiary level, where our young women, aggressively seeking available grant and loan funds, are pursuing studies in a variety of disciplines.

Further, the Amendment to the Title by Registration Act that became effective on 1 January 1999 is one step in redressing the imbalance in the enjoyment of equal property rights by spouses, thus

providing an incremental measure of economic power and independence to women.

However, the negative impacts of globalization and trade liberalization tend to increase poverty in society, and among women in particular, seriously hampering our efforts at narrowing the economic gender gap. For instance, the economic well-being of women in Dominica is seriously threatened by the World Trade Organization ruling on bananas, which has resulted in a loss of income to farming and rural households, the sections of society least able to sustain an income loss. The magnitude of the exacerbation of the problem becomes apparent only when it is realized that women-owned and operated farms constitute 21 per cent of the banana production base. Women are further affected as spouses of male banana farmers.

We need to underscore the seriousness of the problem and we appeal to the international community, through this Assembly, to be mindful of the harm to people's lives and economic prospects that can result from the actions of international bodies.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action declares violence against women to be an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace and a manifestation of the unequal power relations between men and women. Accordingly, gender equality cannot be realized unless and until there is an end to spousal abuse in all its forms.

In dealing with this problem, the Commonwealth of Dominica has adopted a two-pronged approach of education and legislative action. There was a recognized need to raise society's consciousness and awareness of the extent and harmful effects of violence against women. Beginning in November 1997, the Women's Bureau and other women's organizations embarked on a one-year campaign denouncing violence against women through such organized activities as a march and rally, panel discussions, radio programmes and a locally produced television drama series entitled "Wake Up Call".

In 1998 and 1999, the Women's Bureau, in collaboration with the Department of Legal Affairs, conducted a series of three-month programmes of community education sessions on women and the law in eight districts of the country. Those sessions proved to be learning experiences for all parties involved. The programme organizers came away with an enhanced view of the need for legislative action to protect the rights of women in common-law relationships and for a legal aid programme designed to assist women in the enforcement of their rights.

In the area of legislation, the sexual offences act of 1998 has substantially increased penalties and sanctions for engaging in conduct proscribed by the act. The age of consent has been raised from 14 to 16 years. The draft provisions of a domestic violence act intended to deal with all forms of spousal and intra-family abuse are currently under consideration and intensive review.

The National Health Plan of the Commonwealth of Dominica contains programmes specific to the health needs of women and children, including a programme intended to reduce the transmission of HIV/AIDS from mother to child and an extensive family planning programme.

For many decades women have participated freely in the political life of our country. They have made important contributions to our governmental and political institutions at the highest levels, and we expect them to continue to add their unique texture to the cultural, political and economic fabric of our country. We recognize that the task of removing the remaining constraints to gender equality in Dominica is far from complete, but as a nation we are committed to ensuring that all citizens enjoy all the rights enshrined in our Constitution.

We believe, however, that in this national effort towards gender equality men must become more engaged and involved in the formulation of policies and the implementation of programmes geared to that end. In essence, we believe that such an involvement by men will help them acquire a more profound sense of the disabilities under which women are forced to operate in our society, and thus be better equipped to champion women's issues. It is on the basis of that belief that the Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs has effected a change in the designation of the responsible agency from the Bureau of Women's Affairs to the Bureau of Gender Affairs, to afford men and women parallel participation and responsibility in achieving the goals of the agency, and as a step in creating an enabling environment for the implementation of gender mainstreaming.

As we strive to acquire a modicum of economic benefits for our people, we must necessarily accept the

validity of the proposition that sustainable development cannot be realized without the full engagement and complete empowerment of women. Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women is not only the right thing to do; it is in our national socio-economic interest.

The Acting President: I must appeal to speakers to respect the seven-minute limit allocated for the statement of each State.

I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Běla Hejná, Deputy Minister for Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic.

Ms. Hejná (Czech Republic): I am very honoured to take part in and contribute to this special session. The Czech Republic also ranks among the countries that have responded to the conclusions of the Beijing Conference and have endeavoured ever since the holding of the Conference to fulfil its objectives.

In the Czech Republic we are coming to the end of a period of essential social and economic change that has been necessary for the transformation of the country from a communist regime into a free civil society based upon democratic principles. Now that the whole economic and social system has been reorganized and new mechanisms have been successfully implemented, we must turn our attention to how those changes have an impact on the enhancement of the quality of life. We must also be mindful of the effect those changes have on the free formation of structural relationships and institutions of traditional civil society, the guaranteeing of the rights of the individual and the implementation of civil liberties.

Naturally, other related topics have become public issues, such as observance of the principle of civil justice, non-discrimination, the creation of new opportunities and the enhancement of the guarantees that are currently provided to citizens by their Government. Those tendencies are being addressed in governmental policy by means of strengthening the formal prerequisites for the promotion of civil rights, specifically through the process of finalizing internal institutional mechanisms designed to promote human rights and the process of strengthening of the principle of civil justice by means of enhancing the quality of the existing legal system. Both of these processes have a direct impact upon the equality of men and women, or the requirement to eliminate discrimination against women.

The existing traditional human rights institutions, which in the past in fact consisted of only the courts of justice, have been recently complemented by the Council of the Government of the Czech Republic on Human Rights and the post of Governmental Trustee for Human Rights, who at the same time acts as the Council's Chairman. In relation to the Government, both the Council and the Trustee have an advisory and initiative-taking status. Apart from governmental institutions, other stakeholders such as non-governmental organizations and the professional sector have permanent representation in the Council.

These already well-functioning bodies have now been strengthened by the office of the public human rights protector, the ombudsman, whose task is to monitor how, or whether, the public authorities observe the human rights of individuals. The ombudsman also monitors legislation aimed at ensuring civil protection. His or her role is to help remedy any wrongdoing in administrative procedure. The ombudsman usually acts on the basis of suggestions and complaints received from citizens, to whom he or she also gives basic advice.

Increasing public awareness of the gender equality principle and eliminating rigid ideas on the roles of women and men in society is a task we face on an ongoing basis. As we all know, this task is in itself very difficult. Solving this problem in post-communist countries became more complicated due to the fact that the negative impact of forced female emancipation — which began in the 1950s and resulted in almost 100 per cent female employment — still prevails.

For quite a long time women were compensated for these conditions by the artificial protection, artificial relief and benefits related to childcare. The sudden curtailing of that protection might become a socially sensitive issue, although it is a very costly affair which leads employers to prefer male job applicants. In our opinion, this seemingly deadlocked situation might be tackled by implementing a consistent policy of equal opportunities for both men and women, including the principle of equal treatment. A relatively new, and for the Czech public unusual, aspect is the application of the principle of gender equality, which promotes justice for both genders,

unlike the principle of civil neutrality that has been applied until now.

In conclusion, I would like to underline the key importance of international cooperation in formulating and promoting national policy for the sensitive area of equality for men and women. Thanks to this cooperation, and with the help of international legal instruments and valid international commitments, the Czech Republic has been quite successful in finding and adopting the fundamental ideas of a policy which, by its effect, we hope will bring members of both sexes a solid guarantee of their equal development and the opportunity to fulfil their vital aspirations.

The Acting President: I call on Ms. Maria Serkedjieva, Deputy Minister of Justice of Bulgaria.

Ms. Serkedjieva (Bulgaria): It is a great honour for me to be here today and to share with participants such a significant moment in our consolidated efforts towards gender equality and the advancement of women.

My delegation aligned itself with the statement presented by the Minister for Equality of Portugal, made on behalf of the European Union. That is why I would like to concentrate mainly on the latest developments in Bulgaria in the areas of gender equality, development and peace.

It has always been our understanding that the rights of women should be placed within the broader socio-economic and political perspective. In the five-year period after Beijing, the Republic of Bulgaria has achieved considerable progress in the development of civil society and the building of democratic institutions. In this process the Bulgarian Government perceives equality between women and men as a sine qua non of democracy and recognizes that there can be no genuine democracy without the achievement of gender equality. Therefore, the Government, in conjunction with civil society actors, concentrated its efforts to achieve gender equality on certain parallel actions in several spheres at the national and international levels: accession to international legal instruments concerning women's rights, legislative reforms, the adoption of gender-sensitive policies and the elaboration of special programmes for vulnerable groups of the population.

Bulgaria is a State party to the major international instruments on human rights and attaches great importance to the effective implementation of these instruments. In this context, we consider the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women a basic instrument, both in terms of eliminating discrimination against women worldwide and in terms of promoting and protecting women's rights as human rights at the universal level. We share the view that the Optional Protocol to the Convention provides women not only with the necessary legal tool for the protection and promotion of their human rights, but also with concrete procedures for translating these rights into reality.

It is my pleasure and honour to inform the Assembly that two days ago, on Tuesday, 6 June, I signed, on behalf of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. This is an expression of our firm conviction that practical and effective measures should be undertaken in order to broaden the legal framework for the protection of the rights set forth in the Convention. Bulgaria attaches utmost importance to the documents adopted by the Beijing Conference on Women. On this basis, in 1996, the Council of Ministers adopted a National Action Plan, aimed at achieving de facto equality in aspects of public life.

In implementing the Beijing Platform for Action the present Government has significantly increased the participation of women in the decision-making process and has integrated them into the higher levels of public administration. Women make up more than 60 per cent of the executive staff of the ministries and about 60 per cent of the senior positions in the State administration in Bulgaria. At the same time, effective ways and means to also involve men in the process of eliminating obstacles to equality by changing the prevailing power structures and stereotypical gender roles are being explored.

Bulgaria fully supports the basic principle that the rights of women are, and have always been, an integral part of human rights. In the Republic of Bulgaria the principles of equality and non-discrimination are constitutionally guaranteed, and all provisions of the Constitution with regard to human rights are directly applicable. In this context, I would like to stress a specific provision of the Bulgarian Constitution which stipulates that the provisions of the international instruments ratified by the Republic of Bulgaria are an integral part of the national legislation and shall have

supremacy over national legislation, unless the latter stipulates otherwise.

There are no limitations of rights based on distinction between the sexes. Neither are there spheres of activity reserved exclusively for either sex. Women and men enjoy equal civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights. The Penal, Civil and Family Codes, as well as the Labour Code, guarantee the equality of all persons before the law and their equal opportunity to defend their rights in court in cases of the violation of those rights.

However, the Government and civil society in our country have always been sensitive to the specific needs of women. An intergovernmental working group, in close collaboration with women's non-governmental organizations, is in the process of drafting a law on gender equality.

Specific provisions are included in national legislation with respect to women. Let me provide two examples. The Pension Law sets out a specific retirement procedure for mothers who have many children. The second example is that the Labour Code provides for special rights for women employees relevant to their potential or actual status as mothers, including parental paid leave of up to two years and the possibility for female employees with children up to six years of age to work at home. In the spirit of equality of rights and responsibilities in the family and in raising children, the latter provisions are applicable to both parents.

Vulnerable groups, particularly those likely to experience multiple forms of discrimination, have always been the object of special attention by the Bulgarian Government. A good example is the framework programme for the equal integration of Roma in Bulgarian society, adopted by the Council of Ministers in 1999, which was formulated with the active participation of a number of Roma non-governmental organizations. The programme includes a special section on the Roma woman. The programme pays special attention to equal participation by Roma women in social and economic activities.

We are conscious of the fact that good legislative initiatives and practical measures are insufficient to resolve the problems of the advancement of women and gender equality. Those problems are global and require concerted measures at the regional and international levels. In this context, a task force meeting was held on 2 June, under the auspices of the first lady of the Republic of Bulgaria, entitled the "Southeast European leadership initiative: a dialogue for action". That regional initiative was aimed at outlining strategies to address problems and to transform ideas into everyday action. Representatives from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Macedonia, Romania, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria took part in that regional meeting. Participants were determined to promote the fulfilment of regional initiatives in the three working areas of the Stability Pact for South-eastern Europe: human rights and democratization, economy and security. The measures that were outlined will focus on the efforts of women leaders on the main problems faced by women in the region: poverty, violence against women, and participation in the decision-making process in all spheres of life. As a follow-up, a second regional conference on women in the twenty-first century will be held in November this year in Macedonia.

The Bulgarian Government is also firmly committed to participate further in international and regional cooperation aimed at the prevention and elimination of trafficking in women and forced prostitution. Bulgaria is a participant in the non-governmental La Strada programme for the prevention of trafficking in women in Central and Eastern Europe. Currently, a training programme for specialized police officials dealing with the prevention of violence against women and a campaign initiated by the International Organization for Migration for the prevention of trafficking in women and girls are being implemented in Bulgaria.

We face the challenge of pursuing the translation into action of the legal framework on gender equality and the Beijing Platform for Action, although we are conscious of the fact that this will be a long and difficult process. In this connection, I am convinced that the twenty-third special session will contribute to our common efforts towards achieving gender equality. I would like to assure the Assembly once again of Bulgaria's commitment to the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

The Acting President: I next give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Enrique Candioti, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Argentina.

Mr. Candioti (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): The issue of women and gender equality is now on the international agenda and constitutes one of the major challenging forces for the new millennium. This special session is intended to strengthen and enhance the advancement of women's rights — precisely because they are not yet fully respected. Humanity owes all-encompassing recognition to women, and this is obviously the time to provide it.

A priority of the new Argentine Government under President Fernando de la Rúa is to strengthen the human rights achievements made by the international community over the past few decades; the basic treaties in this sphere were incorporated into the Argentine Constitution in 1994. Among those treaties, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has been a most important benchmark for setting the highest standards in our country, which reflects a genuine State policy for all sectors of national life. Our signing, in February 2000, of the Optional Protocol to the Convention underscored Argentina's determination to protect women's rights through the use of international monitoring mechanisms.

In the regional framework of the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR), important progress has been made since 1998 with the establishment of the Specialized Women's Meeting, which was created to formulate recommendations on women's issues to member countries, with the collaboration of regional non-governmental organizations. Five years after Beijing, we are here accompanied by many members of Argentine non-governmental organizations representing all interests and views within civil society, to advocate the promotion and protection of women's rights.

The position of the Argentine Government, as consistently stated in international forums, is inspired by the values that are most precious to all human beings: life, freedom and dignity. The premises of our action in this respect include protecting and defending human life from conception to its natural end; protecting the family as the nucleus of society; recognizing the rights and duties of parents with respect to the education of their children; and affirming the basic responsibility of the State to build a society that is ever more democratic, tolerant, humane and just.

Throughout the world there is violence against women and girls, and there are those who profit from it. Countries are now meeting at Vienna to formulate a protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Public policies in support of the family, which is where the basic rights and values of society are promoted and defended, are a priority for the Argentine Government.

The promotion of women's rights requires that priority be given to education. Argentina's federal education law establishes that the State has a principal responsibility to define the guidelines of educational policy, including the implementation of real equal opportunity for all inhabitants and the rejection of all forms of discrimination, including on the basis of gender, and the elimination of all kinds of discriminatory stereotypes in teaching materials.

The dignity of the human person is strengthened by the struggle against poverty, which affects women specifically. This makes it necessary to guarantee their access to credit and production structures, as well as to ensure the shared responsibility of men in supporting the family. Here I must note that my country recently proposed legislation that creates a register of those who fail to make support payments and establishes penalties for such failure.

We also wish to mention a topic that is very dear to the women of the world — adoption. While this session has not considered it, Argentina deems it timely to encourage such consideration, so that Governments, with the participation of the community, can provide information and facilitate procedures encouraging the adoption, or the giving up for adoption, of a girl or boy.

Argentina promotes the shared responsibility of women and men as a guarantee of full gender equality, proceeding from a concept that ensures women's effective participation in society, aware of the inequalities that still affect them. In this framework, we have measures for positive action, such as the quota law, which obliges political parties to include a minimum of 30 per cent of women candidates in the electoral lists. In this respect, we note with satisfaction, as noted in the statistics of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, that the presence of women in Argentine

legislative bodies, both at the federal and provincial levels, has significantly increased.

We also wish to note that the commitment to guarantee the protection of women's human rights includes their sexual and reproductive rights, as is reflected in the policies implemented by our authorities in the form of measures to reduce maternal mortality, to prevent adolescent pregnancy and to protect the maternity and health of women, while ensuring the inalienable right to free and responsible choice regarding when and how many children they wish to have and respect for life and their personal beliefs. All of this is consistent with the values and premises that inspire the position of the Argentine Government.

The National Council of Women, in coordination with all the authorities and responsible organizations at the national, provincial and municipal levels, has drawn up guidelines for the Government action that go beyond the outdated concepts of "policies for women" and have made the subject of women an area of State concern. The National Council will have, in addition to the measures mentioned above, the following principal objectives: to guarantee the effective fulfilment of international treaties on human rights incorporated in the Constitution; to formulate public policies, from a gender perspective, that contribute to overcoming the different forms of discrimination against women, and that promote proper social conditions to guarantee the effective exercise of their rights; to ensure full access for women to comprehensive health care; to intensify prevention, research and information programmes, and to take effective initiatives to deal with diseases that particularly threaten and affect them, such as AIDS, cancer and malnutrition; to prevent and eradicate the sexual and commercial exploitation of girls, boys and adolescents; to train unemployed women to develop non-traditional activities, under the emergency labour programme and the technical and professional training programme for women with low income; and to combat violence against women and guarantee them access to justice, in compliance with the Inter-American Convention of Belem do Para on the punishment, prevention and eradication of violence against women.

The increasing presence of women in the life of the community and in political decisions will clearly be the best reassurance against individual and collective violence, against intolerance, sectarianism and so many other abuses that have tarnished the history of humankind.

Argentina decisively supports the Beijing Platform for Action and pledges its best efforts so that this special session will result in initiatives and commitments that will reaffirm and ensure its fulfilment. Furthermore, we support proper coordination of the different organizations of the United Nations system involved in the topic of gender, which will lead to great efficiency and effectiveness of international action.

The slogan of our Assembly, by highlighting the equation "equality-development-peace", calls on all of us to contribute to the building of a world free of the scourges of backwardness and war, a world that will ensure a life of freedom, security, solidarity and justice for women and for all human beings.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Fawzi Bin Abdul Majeed Shobokshi, Chairman of the delegation of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Shobokshi (Saudi Arabia)[*spoke in Arabic*]: At the outset, I wish to convey, through you, sir, our sincere congratulations to the President of this special session. Saudi Arabia looks forward to a successful outcome of the session. The international community aspires to advance the status of women, in keeping with their positive and pristine nature and the role that God has created for them, without compromising their dignity or their rights, in accordance with God's laws.

Today we are meeting for a comprehensive review and assessment of the Beijing Platform for Action in order to gauge and reinforce its strengths and to measure its shortcomings, taking into account each society's own characteristics, values and cultural legacies, which are embedded in its conscience over succeeding generations. Nevertheless, we realize that there are universal values that should prevail in all our diverse societies, regardless of their cultural heritage. Because these values are in keeping with God-given sound judgement, we mean them to be the values of right, justice and equality, without discrimination on the basis of race, color or creed.

God the Almighty honoured Holy Mecca, which was made his age-old abode and the seat of revelation. The Islamic message was revealed by God to the Prophet — May Peace be upon Him — who delivered the message, fulfilled the ambition and taught the Muslim nation its concepts, values, laws and principles, foremost of which are the dignity and rights of man.

God blessed Saudi Arabia by making its leaders custodians of the two holy shrines, trustees of the Islamic holy sites and advocates of justice and righteousness, so Saudi Arabia embraced the Holy Koran as a Constitution, the precepts of the Prophet — Peace be upon Him — as a way of life and the Islamic precepts and religious values as a principle. Islam granted women undiminished rights.

In the Koran, God said: "And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them." (The Holy Koran, II, 228). The prophet — May praise be upon him — said: Verily women are the sisters of men. There is balance with regard to women in Islam that preserves their inheritance, education, ownership rights and dignity while stressing their duty to demonstrate their virtue and to protect society, the main responsibility being to build happy families, which form the nucleus of society, without depriving them of their physical and psychological attributes.

We believe that a family based on legal marriage between a man and a woman is the most important foundation for society. Men and women are partners in all fields of life, on the basis of equality and the values that preserve their dignity. Proceeding from this premise, Saudi Arabia attaches great importance to women because of her essential role in building the family.

We have developed plans providing women with the opportunity for advancement, economically, educationally and socially. My Government attaches great importance to social, educational and cultural policies aimed at achieving advanced human development for women so as to enable them to participate effectively with men in all areas of life and to provide them with the opportunity for education in science and the humanities at all levels.

Ninety-five per cent of girls are educated, the percentage is the same as that for boys. The Government provides scholarships and housing for student girls, in keeping with their essential requirements. The sums spent on education constitutes about one quarter of the budget of the State — it is one of the highest percentages worldwide and represents 9 per cent of our gross national product. Women have the opportunity to gain access to jobs in keeping with their aptitudes and the preservation of their dignity. They work in all sectors of the government and participate in cultural, educational, medical, nursing and social work, as well as in administrative and academic leadership. In order to enable women to assume their responsibilities in society or within the family and to increase their opportunities for employment, the State is seeking to create and open up job opportunities for women. In this respect, we have introduced part-time jobs at full salaries for women in certain fields.

Together with these efforts to ensure a decent life for women, we also attach great importance to medical and social care for women and girls. Such programmes take place in both rural and urban areas within the framework of my country's plans to implement the principle of health care for all as a national strategy and to ensure and support the continuation of our social development, which exceeds by far that of many other countries of the world. Social security programmes also ensure that women can lead decent lives in the event that they lose the head of the household or become disabled.

Saudi women have complete freedom to own, sell and purchase shares and stocks and have access to credit, through concessional loans, from funds created by the Government. These interest-free, 25-year soft loans enable them to start their own businesses or to own property. This policy is in accordance with the Islamic shariah, which grants women legal rights from birth, as well as independent financial status and the enjoyment of all rights, including the right to inherit and to obtain a divorce in the event that married life becomes unbearable, as well as to custody and alimony.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has reaffirmed its opposition to discrimination by acceding to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. In Saudi Arabia, we are eager for women to enjoy all their rights and fulfil all their duties, including the right to education and work and protection from poverty. In addition, the State protects the freedom of all in accordance with the Islamic shariah and Islamic practices and laws, provided they do not contravene general order and decency.

In the context of our interest in women's issues, the Consultative Council has recently discussed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopting it on 7 May 2000 during regular session number 71.

We live in a time of interdependent and interrelated interests and benefits. Humanity is looking

forward to a century in which constructive cooperation, human brotherhood and mutual respect and equality will prevail. It behoves us to take account of and implement all international conventions and instruments while maintaining full respect for national sovereignty and the national, religious, cultural and historical characteristics of individual societies. At a time when crises, conflicts and wars are proliferating and the number of victims, primarily women and children, is becoming harder to count, we must adhere to noble humanitarian and religious values in order to transcend the domination of man over his brother and in order to rid ourselves of the wrong concepts that led to the commercial exploitation of women, which in turn led to the disintegration of the family and society as a whole.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Li Hyong Chol, Chairman of the delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Li Hyong Chol (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Mr. Gurirab on his election as President of the twenty-third special session of The General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". My delegation appreciates the efforts made by the Secretariat to ensure the success of this special session.

Since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, considerable achievements have been made through active endeavours to ensure the advancement of women. In this regard, the report of the Secretary-General as contained in document E/CN.6/2000/PC/2 deserves attention. As the report states, this special session should give priority to action-oriented measures to further achieve the goals of the 12 critical areas of concern which are spelt out in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

My delegation is proud of the fact that, in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, women's issues are given the utmost priority in social progress and that a satisfactory solution to that effect has been made through relevant legislation and policy measures. The enactment of the law on gender equality, proclaimed in 1947, was a historic event that brought about fundamental change by eliminating all forms of discrimination against women, which had been a root cause of all the misfortunes and sufferings of women in olden times. Having a firm legal basis through the promulgation of this law, the equal rights of women have been further guaranteed through the state measures and social policies that have been taken in conformity with the benevolent policy introduced by the great leader President Kim Il Sung and carried on by the great General Kim Jong Il.

The socialist Constitution and family law of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea are also important legislative measures that lay out in greater detail the articles of previous laws so that women, having equal rights with men, can freely participate in activities in the political, social and economic fields.

Today in my country, there are a significant number of women deputies to the Supreme People's Assembly and female army officers, scientists and managers of enterprises and farms. They are playing an important role in politics, the military, the economy and other spheres and are leading worthwhile lives with social respect and affection. In addition, women of my country enjoy full paid maternity leave of more than 150 days and those who have mothered many children are provided with additional benefits from the State. Indeed, it is praiseworthy that the women of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea are demonstrating their brilliant skills in state politics, social life and economic construction at such an important historical juncture as today, when the army-first policy of the great General Kim Jong Il's function of the National Defense Commission of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, has been successfully launched, thereby expediting progress towards building a powerful nation displaying its national dignity throughout the world.

My delegation attaches particular importance to the solution of the issue of violence against women, to which international attention has been drawn in recent years. In this regard, we are greatly concerned by the severe violence against vulnerable women arising from the negative impact of globalization, armed conflicts, political pressure and economic sanctions.

In the forums of the United Nations, such as the Conferences on women, it has been urged that greater attention be paid to the protection of women's rights, and in particular to ending violence against women. However, violence against women, to our regret, has not been eliminated and incidents of more serious concern have sometimes been witnessed. This is above

all, attributable to the political perception that issues concerning women may be regarded as a means for achieving unjustifiable objectives.

The world is well aware of Japan's past crime of forcing many Asian and European women, including over 200,000 Korean women and girls, into serving the Japanese army as sex slaves. It was a great crime against humanity, with the intentional involvement of the Japanese Government and military authorities and has thus has aroused the strong condemnation of the international community.

Finding the proper solution to the issue of "comfort women" is one of the major international issues in the process of seeking a comprehensive settlement of women's issues and an apology and compensation are prerequisites to this end. Stubborn opposition to apologizing and to providing compensation for past crimes and a refusal to seek a solution should be condemned internationally.

Today, in Japan, incidents of violence against and insults to resident Korean women and girls, for the simple reason that they are Koreans and wear Korean national clothes, have been observed time and again. The skirts of resident Korean women and girls are torn in broad daylight on the streets. Such violence against women causes serious concern. Similarly, all forms of violence against Korean women perpetrated by United States soldiers in South Korea, including rape, murder, insults and so on, should be stopped at once. Unless such issues are fully resolved, international efforts to denounce and prevent violence against women, including sexual slavery in armed conflict, can never be effective.

My delegation is of the view that there should be no exception in criminalizing any kind of violence against women and that those responsible should accordingly be brought to justice. The current special session should pay particular attention to ensuring moral and material compensation to the victims of immeasurable insults and sexual violence in the past.

My delegation reaffirms that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will continue to advance with a firm policy of promoting the well-being and privilege of women and that it will fully implement the commitments of the Fourth World Conference on Women. In doing so, it will make its contribution to the efforts of the international community to put an end to all forms of inequalities and injustices against women.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jacques Louis Boisson, Chairman of the delegation of Monaco.

Mr. Boisson (Monaco) *(spoke in French)*: At the outset, on behalf of the Government of the Principality, I congratulate Mr. Gurirab on his election to the presidency of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. In its capacity as Vice-President and as a member of the Bureau, the Principality of Monaco and its delegation are ready to support him unreservedly and to help him succeed in his lofty mission.

The picture one might draw of women in the year 2000 is quite different from that drawn five years ago at Beijing and still more so from anything that might have been imagined at the first World Conference on Women held in Mexico City in July 1975.

Does it mean that the objectives set — all the objectives — have been achieved? Certainly not. While progress has been remarkable, serious obstacles to further progress remain. Women too often must still confront poverty, powerful traditional and environmental constraints, difficulties of access to education and training and thus to the political and economic power through which societies change and define their evolution.

The authorities of Monaco, aware of these difficulties, have taken legislative, economic and social measures to strengthen the recognition of the rights of women living and working in Monaco. At the international level, they have encouraged humanitarian associations, particularly through financial assistance, to work to improve the living conditions of disadvantaged women and girls in the countries of the South.

Our national report broadly sets forth the initiatives that have been undertaken. I wish to mention some that appear to be significant and strongly to reiterate our commitment to the principles and recommendations that the international community adopted five years ago and which it is preparing to confirm on the basis of its solid and fruitful experience.

A significant date in the political life of Monaco was certainly 17 December 1962, when the present Constitution was proclaimed. Article 33 of this Constitution accorded to women, upon reaching legal age, the right to vote and to be elected to the

Communal Council and the National Council, Monaco's Parliament.

The possibility thus offered to women to accede to political power would bring with it a profound evolution in attitudes and lifestyles for the entire population. This evolution continues. Recently, the National Council proposed a resolution, which was unanimously adopted by the Parliament, whereby the Government of the Principality is asked to modify some of the provisions of the civil code regarding family law, thus supporting the social movement.

The role of education and professional training has been and continues to be decisive. They allow women to participate in greater numbers with competence and authority at the decision-making level of Government. The educational policy, free compulsory primary education, non-discriminatory access to general and professional secondary education and professional training and the facilitation of university education have borne fruit. A fairer distribution of responsibilities among men and women exists today at the heart of Monegasque society.

Today many women occupy important political positions. The Mayor of Monaco is a woman. A quarter of the members of the Communal Council and the National Council are women. At the administrative level, we are happy to say that such important departments as those of the budget and treasury, national education, youth and sports, health and social welfare, economic growth and housing today are headed very ably by women. Two women are advisers in the Cabinet of Ministers of State of the head of Government. Many hold key positions in the three ministerial departments. They represent 52 per cent of the overall staff of the civil service, 35 per cent of whom are directors or heads of services. Therefore, they are closely linked, on a daily basis, to the drafting and implementation of governmental policies.

Women also play a preponderant role in the framework of civil society, and particularly in charitable institutions. They are also very active in the private sector. They hold 46 per cent of service-sector positions. They are also the majority in trade, financial activities, health and social welfare.

With regard to employment, men and women have the same rights. They receive identical pay. Women, nonetheless, benefit from special protective measures: certain dangerous forms of employment are prohibited for women. Aside from pre- and post-natal leave, the law allows mothers to suspend their work contract in order to raise a child, and they are given priority when it comes to re-employment. Those who wish to continue working have childcare services available to them. Financial aid can be given to single mothers or to those who wish to dedicate themselves exclusively to caring for their families.

In addition to these measures, we are happy to note that there is a new mentality in Monaco that should lead to greater balance between men and women, based upon real equality, mutual respect and a recognition of the rights and capacities of each individual. The Government of Monaco is trying to contribute regularly and substantially to improving the conditions of disadvantaged women and girls and those living in extreme hardship. Besides annual payments in the form of voluntary contributions to various United Nations programmes, that assistance also takes the form of assistance to non-governmental organizations with headquarters in Monaco, such as the World Association of Friends of Children (AMADE), Monaco Aid and Support and Mission Childhood.

Among the most exemplary achievements with which many women are associated are shelters to assist street girls avoid the poverty, delinquency, drugs and prostitution that threaten them; children's and mothers' protection centres; re-education and reintegration centres for disabled women; professional training workshops for girls; primary schooling exclusively for girls; and maternity hospitals and a sex education centre.

Medical initiatives also deserve to be highlighted, such as assistance to women with leprosy or AIDS in many African regions, training in public health and the struggle against nutritional blindness in children. In the latter case, African mothers receive retinol and vitamin A, or learn to grow the vitamin-rich vegetables vital to preventing this disease. This international programme, called Tears Without Eyes, is carried out with AMADE and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), as is the "School of the four winds", an institute from which many girl children benefit , that is adapted to the way of life and work of street children.

In conclusion, we must recognize, unfortunately, that in spite of the efforts made, equality between men and women is still far from being achieved. By recalling the limitations that a rapid improvement in a

situation often encounters, this session provides the opportunity to reaffirm goals and made them really possible.

My country's authorities and many of my compatriots are fully convinced that it is vital to pursue our efforts and to accelerate the transformation of societies through the ever-more effective collaboration of women so that the common objectives we set for ourselves five years ago will be attained as soon as possible. We hope that greater harmony will come about within humankind, between men and women, and will contribute to establishing more harmonious balance in relations between nations.

The Declaration adopted in Luxembourg by the International Organization of La Francophonie, which has been distributed as an official document, represents a guide and a precious source of inspiration. We look forward to Minister Alimata Salambéré's speaking on Friday on behalf of the Secretary-General of La Francophonie, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

The Acting President: I call on Ms. Eka Ebralidze, representative of Georgia.

Ms. Ebralidze (Georgia): It is my great pleasure to address this session and report on the efforts of the Government of Georgia to promote gender equality and the advancement of women since the Fourth World Conference in Beijing.

Georgia gained independence in 1991 and has spent the last decade overcoming internal conflicts and economic and financial problems. It remains a country in transition to a democratic society. In 1995 Georgia adopted a Constitution, desired by the Georgian people to establish a democratic social order, market economy and law-based State. From an official point of view, the prerequisites for women and men are the same in all essential respects in Georgia.

In addition to passing new, gender-neutral legislation, the Government of Georgia has taken a number of steps specifically directed at promoting gender equality and the advancement of women.

On 22 September 1994, Georgia joined the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In 1995, the Georgian delegation participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women and signed the Beijing Platform for Action. On 20 February 1998, the President of Georgia established the State Commission on the elaboration of State policy for women's advancement. In June 1998, the President of Georgia approved a National Plan of Action for improving the condition of women. A joint project on women in development sponsored by the Government of Georgia and the United Nations Development Programme has been operating in Georgia since 1997.

With regard to the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action, Georgia's priorities are the related problems of poverty and internal conflict. Two hundred fifty thousand internally displaced persons from the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are currently living in temporary accommodation throughout Georgia. Among them are 150,000 women and children. The health of those women and children is at serious risk, and the Government has made health assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons a top priority.

Based on recommendations made by the twenty-first session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, held in August 1999, the President of Georgia issued a decree on measures to strengthen the protection of women's rights in Georgia. That decree obliges different ministries to work towards eliminating direct and indirect discrimination against women, carry out gender analyses of Georgian legislation and textbooks, ensure women's involvement in negotiating resolutions to the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia and develop special programmes aimed at helping refugees and internally displaced persons.

The Commission on the advancement of women has developed, and the President has approved, a National Plan to combat the various forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, violence in the workplace, ethnic violence directed against women and ecological violence affecting women and children.

The Government has also considered establishing a department of women's issues and creating gender units within governmental structures. Unfortunately, progress has not been made on these initiatives due to current budgetary constraints.

My Government's overall policy objective is to develop a society in which women and men have the same rights and opportunities. As I have just described, some positive steps have been taken with regard to dividing and redistributing power between men and

women, but the reality of women's low rate of participation in political and economic life shows that women's roles and participation in the decision-making process is not satisfactory.

In the executive branch of Government there are currently 2 female ministers out of a total of 19, the Ministers for ecology and culture. Women hold a small but growing percentage of other executive branch positions, such as deputy ministers and diplomats.

In the legislative branch, 1,349 women became members of local authorities in the 1998 local elections, the first local elections held in independent Georgia. That number represents only 12.5 per cent of the total. Few women hold high positions in local government.

In the parliamentary elections held in 1999, 17 women were elected out of a total of 235 members of Parliament, representing 7.2 per cent of the total. Two women members of Parliament were elected chairpersons of parliamentary committees, namely, the committee on foreign affairs and the committee on human rights.

Serious reform of the judiciary has been carried out in Georgia only during the past two years. Under the new qualification system, 40 per cent of newly appointed judges are women. Twelve new Supreme Court judges were elected by the Parliament in June 1999, six of whom — 50 per cent — were women.

We believe that it is vital for our society to rectify these imbalances, in both the public and private sectors, so as to take advantage of the expertise and experience of women. This forum provides a valuable opportunity to coordinate with, and to learn from, the experiences of other Governments that have faced this challenge.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Teresa Efua Asangono, Minister for Women's Integration and Social Affairs of Equatorial Guinea.

Mrs. Asangono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the delegation of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, allow me at the outset to extend to the President our warm congratulations on his illustrious election.

I am grateful for the opportunity that has been given to me at this forum to express the warm greetings of the nation of Equatorial Guinea and of its President, Mr. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, to the peoples of all the countries of the world represented here, and in particular to the people of the United States of America, who have received us with such kindness.

I am also grateful for the opportunity to participate in this special session of the General Assembly to make our contribution to the consideration of a topic of vital importance, "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". We commend the United Nations on its initiative to convene almost all of the countries of the world to reflect upon global policies on gender equality after the holding of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. We would like to express our appreciation to the Preparatory Committee for the excellent work it has done on its report.

The history of discrimination against and social exclusion of women is a long one. The problem is more structural than situational in nature, more global than local and more general than specific. That does not mean that its causes are the same in all or most countries.

We have listened to the various very interesting statements made here. In our country we have noticed that the problem of women in society has a great deal to do with increased social stratification by gender and local patrilineal societies. From that perspective we can say that institutionalized discrimination does not exist in the Republic of Equatorial Guinea. What does exist is attitudinal discrimination. Consequently, and independently from the legislative action of the State, a new form and method of socialization of girls and boys is currently under way.

Communications media are informing and forming society. Schools and families, as the main agents of socialization, have assumed roles and behaviours to eliminate the obstacles on the path of full equality. It is indeed worth noting that the enjoyment of equal human rights by men and women is a principle that was accepted by 171 countries at the World Conference on Human Rights held in June 1993.

In this framework, the State policies of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea have as their objectives: equal access for women to basic social services, including education and health; equal opportunities to participate in political and economic decision-making; equal pay for equal work; equal protection under the

law, the elimination of discrimination on the basis of gender, the elimination of violence against women, and equal rights in every area of public life. Nevertheless, the efforts that my country's Government has undertaken will be insufficient if they are not accompanied by concrete measures at the national and international levels.

The lower enrolment of women in secondary education is the result of a high dropout rate, due in turn to a high frequency of early marriage. Other factors that have kept women in poverty are the lack of an international framework for development cooperation and the weakness of the non-profit volunteer sector.

But with the aim of bringing about structural reform, equitable social development and fair economic growth, the Government adopted a medium-term economic strategy for 1997 to 2001 at a national economic conference held at Bata from 8 to 13 September 1997. The purpose of that conference was to enhance good governance and administration and to allocate resources to improve the quality of life for our people on a fair and lasting basis.

Similarly, my Government has held a conference on rural development and food security. The strategic guidelines adopted at that conference encompass various recommendations of the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development and of the 1995 Beijing Conference as they relate to access to and use of high-quality reproductive health services by all women of Equatorial Guinea, to greater awareness by policy-makers, and to promoting gender issues with a view to reducing the disparities between men and women.

Issues relating to women and development are a priority for the Government of Equatorial Guinea. To respond to the needs of women, we have established a Ministry of Women's Integration and Social Affairs. The ministry's overall focus includes promoting human development through participation and the promotion of equality; organization, administration, coordination and implementation of policies, plans, programmes and activities for the advancement of women and women's rights; implementation of a gender strategy including the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and full and fair access to economic resources, including the right to inheritance, the ownership of land and other property, credit, natural resources and relevant technology. The access of women to decision-making circles is reflected by the significant presence of Equatorial Guinea women in Government, parliament and the supreme court, as well as in high public-order and foreign diplomatic posts.

Yet despite these efforts, women continue to face inequality. My Government recently adopted law 6/1999 of 6 December 1999, which amended some provisions of law 2/1999 governing national employment policies, and which set aside for women 15 per cent of overall jobs in businesses in Equatorial Guinea.

Globalization requires national awareness of the problems and difficulties faced by all human beings: men and women, boys and girls, young and old, African, Asian and European. Globalization must have no winners or losers. We are convinced that unifying criteria and coordinating the action of Governments, international organizations and the non-profit volunteer sector, including both public and private entities, will enable us to overcome the problems that affect nearly all women in the world.

We thank the organizers of this special session for their kind invitation, and for the help and facilities they have made available.

The meeting rose at 6.35 p.m.